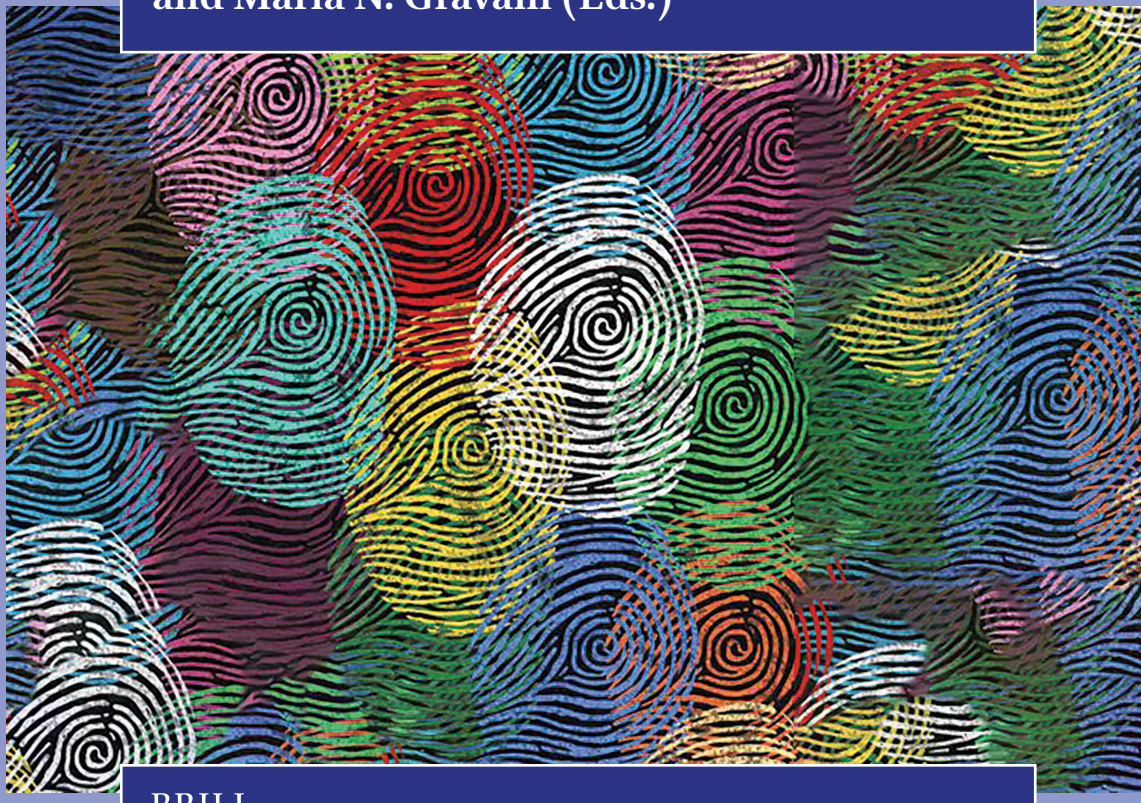
RESEARCH ON THE EDUCATION AND LEARNING OF ADULTS

Adult Educators in the Face of Crises in Europe

Managing Challenges, Shaping Identities and Changing Cultures

Larissa Jõgi, George K. Zarifis, Susanne Lattke and Maria N. Gravani (Eds.)



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Adult Educators in the Face of Crises in Europe

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The European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA)

ESREA is a European scientific society. It was established in 1991 to provide a European-wide forum for all researchers engaged in research on adult education and learning and to promote and disseminate theoretical and empirical research in the field. Since 1991 the landscape of adult education and learning has changed to include more diverse learning contexts at formal and informal levels. At the same time there has been a policy push by the European Union, OECD, UNESCO and national governments to promote a policy of lifelong learning. ESREA provides an important space for these changes and (re)definition of adult education and learning in relation to research, theory, policy and practice to be reflected upon and discussed. This takes place at the triennial conference, network conferences and through the publication of books and a journal.

ESREA Research Networks

The major priority of ESREA is the encouragement of co-operation between active researchers in the form of thematic research networks which encourage inter-disciplinary research drawing on a broad range of the social sciences. These research networks hold annual/biennial seminars and conferences for the exchange of research results and to encourage publications. The current active ESREA networks are:

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- Active Democratic Citizenship and Adult Learning
- Adult Educators, Trainers and their Professional Development
- Between Global and Local – Adult Learning and Communities
- Education and Learning of Older Adults
- Gender and Adult Learning
- History of Adult Education and Training in Europe
- Life History and Biography
- Migration, Transnationalism and Racisms
- Policy Studies in Adult Education
- Spaces, Times, and the Rhythms of the Education of Adults and its Movements (S.T.R.E.A.M.)
- Transformative and Emancipatory Adult Education
- Working Life and Learning

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In order to encourage the widest possible forum for the exchange of ongoing research activities ESREA holds a triennial European Research Conference. The conferences have been held in Strobl (1995), Bruxelles (1998), Lisbon (2001), Wroclaw (2004), Seville (2007), Linköping (2010), Berlin (2013), Maynooth (2016), Belgrade (2019), Milano (2022) and Prague (2025).

ESREA Journal

ESREA publishes a scientific open access journal entitled *The European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* (RELA). All issues of the journal can be read at www.rela.ep.liu.se. You can also find more information about call for papers and submission procedures on this website.

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Scope

'Research on the Education and Learning of Adults' aims at providing an in-depth insight on the diversity of current research on adult education in diverse teaching/learning contexts in both geographical and cultural terms in Europe. Research on adult education has been characterised by different intellectual traditions, theoretical and methodological approaches and which are still alive today in Europe from the north to the south and from the west to the east. This book series is edited by the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA). The content of the series reflects the wide range of research activities undertaken by ESREA's members and networks such as: access, learning careers and identities; active citizenship; the professional development of adult educators; working life; the history of adult education; gender; local development and adult learning; ethnicity; older learners; adult education policies and biographical research. This book series will appeal to

an international audience as it engages with current and relevant empirical research, a range of theoretical perspectives and knowledge thus stimulating debate, discussion and knowledge dissemination in the field in a democratic and heterogeneous way.

Further information on ESREA is available at www.esrea.org

Emilio Lucio-Villegas
Barbara Merrill
Cristina C. Vieira
Henning Salling Olesen

Foreword

Emilio Lucio-Villegas

The organisers of this book have generously invited me to write a prologue. The book addresses the challenges faced by adult educators in times of crisis, with a particular focus on the COVID-19 pandemic. This focus seems entirely logical to me, as it is only now that we can truly reflect on those events. What should not have happened, under any circumstances, was the emergence of studies—whose quality I will not assess here—on the consequences of the pandemic before it had even ended. Research, among other things, is a reflective process, and proper review requires time, as demonstrated by the authors of these valuable texts included in the volume.

However, since the pandemic, other events have unfolded, maintaining an endless crisis as a constant element of our daily lives. Before offering a brief contribution on what I believe adult educators—and, indeed, all educators at any level—can do, I would like to reflect on these developments. To begin, I will recall a story from the pandemic.

I do not remember exactly where I saw it—perhaps on Facebook, in a newspaper, or elsewhere—but during or shortly after the pandemic, a cartoon circulated. Although I have been unable to locate it again, I remember the story more or less. The cartoon depicted two extraterrestrials—a father and a son—observing Earth. In his adolescent eagerness, the son asked his father: "When are we going to invade Earth? Now is the perfect time, as they are preoccupied with other matters". The father responded—and I emphasize that I am not quoting verbatim, as memory may fail me—"Wait and be patient, my son. More events will unfold that will weaken them further, and then it will be the right moment to invade".

What events have transpired since the pandemic? I will mention only the most well-known, without delving into environmental degradation, the ongoing and endless wars in Africa, or the post-pandemic surge in prices.

The first was the Russian's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. This came accompanied by an imperialist discourse to its neighborhoods and the threat to utilize atomic weapons against the entire world. Perhaps Russian's invasion started in 2014 when annexed Crimea, against international laws, and without response of the international community beyond the usual messages to condemn it. On the contrary of 2014, now we are living in a state of war not seeing since the middle of past century.

Then came the terrible slaughter by Hamas on October 7, 2023. This was responded by the State of Israel with the invasion of Gaza, and the destruction of houses, hospitals, schools, infrastructures. Egyptian's border was closed to

impede the entrance of both food and medicines to civil population. When I am writing these pages, around 50,000 people are dead—including the killing of members of NGOs such as the Red Cross and others—and the territory has been devastated. Now, there is the idea to build a kind of Riviera after spelling Palestinians from their homeland. In the other side of the Palestinian state, people are also spelled, and new colonies are set—always condemned by United Nations without any results. In this situation, just days before I wrote this foreword, the Palestinian director—and 2025 Oscar-winner—Hamdan Ballal was attacked by colonists and arrested for a few hours. In relation to this whole situation, Europe is looking to other way.

When extraterrestrials are seriously considering the possibility to invade Earth, Mr. Donald Trump won the election in the United States. In the last three months, Mr. Trump has declared a war tariff against the entire world—including penguins and seals—has threatened to buy or to annex Greenland, Canada or the Panama Channel, wants to build a tourist resort in Gaza, has closed some federal departments such as USAID or The Department of Education, has removed books from schools of the Department of Defense, 'Freckleface Strawberry' written by the actress Julianne Moore—and—this list only focuses on the major issues—has cut funding for research on climate change, vulnerable groups, gender issues, and so on. Now, it is possible that after all these events extraterrestrials come and invade Earth before it disappears from the Universe.

And in the face of all this, what can adult educators do?

First and foremost, I believe it is essential to recall Romain Rolland's phrase—often attributed to Antonio Gramsci—"Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will", or, as Freire put it, we cannot remain in indignation; we must, and indeed we are called to, construct a pedagogy of hope.

The construction of hope is a collective endeavor, a community-based task that reconnects us with one of the core principles of adult education, a principle increasingly eroded by the relentless advance of lifelong learning policies and practices. These have imposed a managerial and corporate logic upon education, sidelining the understanding of education as a social and collective act, and above all, as a human right.

As stated, hope is collective; it must be built upon what Richard Sennett (2000) referred to as "the dangerous pronoun". In *The Corrosion of Character*, Sennett recounts the story of a group of IBM employees who, through collective reflection on the causes of their dismissal, come to understand that their situation is not a matter of personal failure, but is rooted in broader socioeconomic contexts and corporate policies. This collective reflection enables them to analyze their reality and to move from indignation to hope.

Part of this path, from indignation to hope, must involve an effort to understand the global context in which we now live. Over two decades ago, Michael

Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004) defined this context as *Empire*. Among other features, Empire is characterized by a state of perpetual war—between nations and within them—by its dominance over all aspects of human life (what they termed *biopower*, manifest today in, for example, the erosion of privacy brought about by social media), and by the fact that Empire—as a diffuse form of domination and coercion—emerged in reaction to the advances made by what the authors called the *Multitude*.

What are those advances made by the Multitude? They become clear when we examine the responses of the Empire: feminism as a matter of all, as bell hooks (2017) advocated; the welfare state, long the pride of European societies and a mechanism to protect the most vulnerable; the celebration of diversity in gender, ethnicity, and religion. Josephine Quinn (2025) reminds us of that classical civilization—of which we are all heirs—did not emerge solely from Greece or Rome, but from human mobility, from migration and diversity rather than homogenization. Ultimately, we all come from Africa (e.g., Pattison, 2024; White et al., 2014) and from processes of cultural and biological mixing.

By analyzing these realities, I believe it is possible to build hope.

A second and final point—since I want this prologue to remain brief, as what truly matters is what follows, what the authors of this book share and explain—concerns the urgent need to reclaim adult education.

Adult education has traditionally been rooted in people's lives, in their communities, in the everyday contexts of work and home. It has sought to be a tool for fostering critical thinking and civic engagement, enabling individuals to participate in politics as Aristotle conceived it: as concern for the public sphere, for what affects us as members of a community, in educational and occupational settings where we live.

However, the lifelong learning policies promoted by the European Union over the past 25 years have centered educational policy on profit and corporate benefit, rather than on the construction of citizenship. The focus on education for employment and the concept of *employability* has reduced individuals to mere workers and consumers, neglecting the idea that education is a social practice that contributes to the making of the person in their community.

I believe this book is rich in valuable proposals to reclaim those adult education practices and, in doing so, to recover an adult education as a tool for personal and collective development. Perhaps this is the greatest challenge facing today's adult educators.

University of Seville, Spain
Seville, April 2025

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We thank all the authors for their commitment and valuable contributions to this book. Altogether 20 academics and scholars appear in the list of contributors, but some more colleagues who contributed to the book need to be acknowledged.

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Introduction

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CHAPTER 1

Challenges Related to Crisis and Adult Education

Setting the Context

Larissa Jõgi, George K. Zarifis, Susanne Lattke and Maria N. Gravani

Abstract

The first chapter sets the context for this book which explores the evolving identities, practices, and challenges faced by adult educators across Europe amidst recent crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and economic and social upheavals. These events have disrupted adult learning and reshaped the educational landscape, demanding rapid adjustments from educators. The book examines how these crises impact educators' identities, agency, and professional practice, particularly considering the precarious working conditions many face.

Through empirical studies and theoretical reflections, the book investigates how adult educators navigate these turbulent times, addressing identity formation, professionalization, and adaptation, while highlighting the ethical and social dimensions of their work. It also addresses the increasing digitalization of learning environments and the emergence of new learner groups. Structured into two parts with 12 chapters, the book offers diverse perspectives and research findings, contributing to understanding how to support the professionalization of adult educators and respond to crises with resilience and innovation.

Keywords

crisis – adult education – adult educators – Europe

1 Introduction—A Story Behind the Book

From the COVID-19 pandemic to the war in Ukraine, from economic instability to environmental and social upheavals, crises have impact on adults learning possibilities and reshaped adult educational landscape. Under pandemic conditions, learning has been disrupted not only for adult learners, but also for adult educators in their professional practice and context. Other crises did not pose an

existential threat, but required rapid and/or far-reaching adjustments in terms of required content, topics, competences or special needs of target groups, which is why teachers have faced and continue to face numerous challenges in adapting to the new situations. These crises not only demand new responses from educators, but also impact their identity, agency, social positions, sense of being and professional practice. It should also not be forgotten that a significant proportion of (mostly freelance) adult educators in many countries work under permanently precarious working conditions, so that even in 'normal' times they find themselves in a kind of permanent existential crisis, which is exacerbated by current social upheavals such as those mentioned above.

The ESREA Research Network for Adult Educators (RENADET), from which this book emerged, is dedicated to advancing the professional development, practice, and research of adult educators and trainers across Europe. Established to address the unique challenges and opportunities in adult education, RENADET serves as a hub for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers committed to enhancing the quality and relevance of adult learning in diverse contexts.

RENADET's core focus lies in fostering critical dialogue and collaborative research on the evolving roles of adult educators and trainers. By exploring themes such as pedagogical innovation, professional identity, digital competencies, and ethical practice, the network seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical research and practical application. It emphasizes the importance of adult educators as catalysts for lifelong learning, social inclusion, and workforce development, particularly in an era marked by rapid technological change and global inequalities.

A key strength of RENADET is its participatory approach. Through biennial conferences, workshops, and online forums, members engage in knowledge-sharing on topics like transformative teaching methods, adult learning policies, and strategies for addressing marginalized learners.

Collaborative projects and publications, such as the network's working papers and conference proceedings, provide platforms for disseminating cutting-edge insights and evidence-based practices. RENADET also prioritizes inclusivity, advocating for equitable access to professional development opportunities for educators in formal, non-formal, and informal settings. By highlighting issues such as precarious employment, recognition of qualifications, and the emotional labor of teaching adults, the network amplifies voices often overlooked in educational discourse.

For adult educators and vocational trainers, engagement with RENADET offers access to a supportive community, resources for reflective practice, and tools to influence policy. Its alignment with ESREA's broader mission ensures that members contribute to shaping a more just and responsive adult education

landscape. As adult learning grows in strategic importance, RENADET's role in nurturing resilient, adaptable educators is vital. By uniting research and practice, the network empowers professionals to meet the demands of 21st-century learners, fostering societies where education truly transcends age and circumstance.

In the above context, RENADET recognizes that periods of socio-economic and geopolitical crises have historically served as catalysts for profound changes in educational practices and policies. Adult educators, who traditionally operate in environments marked by fluidity and diversity of learner needs, are uniquely positioned to respond to the challenges these crises engender. Their roles extend beyond the mere transmission of knowledge; they become facilitators of critical thinking, agents of social change, and mediators between shifting political landscapes and the everyday experiences of adult learners. This book examines the multifaceted roles of adult educators during periods of turmoil and highlights the inherent challenges they face. Drawing on theories of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000), critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), and lifelong learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014), the discussion elucidates how adult educators must adapt to support learners empowerment and societal resilience amidst economic, social instability and geopolitical unrest. It also examines how the resilience of adult educators themselves can be ensured and promoted in these crisis contexts.

Lifelong learning and lifewide development have become more essential than ever. Several major EU policy initiatives stress the importance of becoming a professional and investing in learning for adults and throughout life. European policy recognizes that everyone has the right to education, training, and lifelong learning. This idea has been highlighted in the European Pillar of Social Rights and its subsequent action plan, which sets a new EU headline target of 60% of adults participating in training every year by 2030 (Eurydice Report, 2021, p. 5).

Based on these initiatives and having in mind the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian-Ukrainian war, social crises, and social transformations around the world, we would like to give deep attention to the professionalisation and learning of adult educators who support and help adults engage in learning, explore and honor their experience and identities, and make visible their professional voices.

Previous studies have highlighted the multiple crises experienced since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020 that have encouraged adult educators to rethink and revitalize their professional practices to respond to learners with understanding and care as they work through their challenges (e.g., Boeren et al., 2020; Kaiser & McKenna, 2021; Wlodarsky & Hansman, 2022). This book

takes up and expands on these crisis issues based on new empirical studies and supplements them with further thematic and theoretical aspects

Adult education today is characterized by its responsiveness to the changing socio-political landscape. In times of economic downturn, for instance, adult educators are often called upon to provide retraining and upskilling opportunities, enabling individuals to remain competitive in the labor market (Brookfield, 2011). Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has significantly impacted various aspects of Ukrainian society facing unique and huge challenges. Educational institutions, forced to adapt to restrictions and threats of pandemic times, are now facing the task of guaranteeing the safety, continuity, and accessibility of education in the most difficult circumstances of the ongoing war (Ivanenko, 2024). Likewise, geopolitical crises, ranging from regional conflicts to global pandemics, challenge traditional educational models and necessitate innovative approaches to ensure continuity in learning. These crises also underscore the critical need for educators who can foster critical consciousness among learners, encouraging them to question prevailing narratives and engage actively in societal transformation (Cranton, 2016).

Our book explores the dual dimensions of the adult educator's role: first, as a promoter of critical thinking, dialogical position and adaptive learning in the face of adversity; and second, as a professional contending with structural, institutional, and personal challenges in a rapidly changing world. In doing so, the book provides an overview of the theoretical foundations of adult education during crises, a discussion of the evolving roles of educators, an examination of the multifaceted challenges they encounter, and finally, an exploration of strategies and professional practices that may mitigate these challenges.

Through this analysis, it becomes evident that the intersection of socio-economic and geopolitical crises creates a dynamic, if precarious, environment where adult educators must continuously negotiate the demands of policy, technology, and the lived realities of their learners. The issues that the current volume touches upon are many, hence they cover a large spectrum of individual and professional experience as well as research findings. However, there are three distinctive issues (including some respective sub-issues) that this book wants to highlight.

2 Roles of Adult Educators in Crises

Sylvia Walby analyses the crisis and the types of impact of the crisis on society. A crisis can have more than one kind of impact on society: a crisis may be recuperated, so that the possibility of significant or permanent change is not fulfilled; a crisis may intensify an existing set of social relations, that is, it may

accelerate a trajectory of development; a crisis may lead to transformation of the societal system from one form to another; a crisis may lead to catastrophe and the ending of that form of society (Walby, 2022). Crises seem to have become the new normal. From the financial crisis to the refugee crisis to the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine—the latest, but probably not the last example. Crisis always brings new challenges and tasks to the field of lifelong learning and adult education, and especially for adult educators who work in this field. The climate crisis, COVID-19, and the health crisis immediately, and later the Russia-Ukraine war, radically necessitated changes in Europe and in the way we worked as researchers, not only in terms of fieldwork, but also in terms of collaboration.

> It is crucial to recognize that researchers themselves were also operating in a new and difficult context. This made traditional ways of researching and engaging with policymakers and stakeholders suddenly unsustainable. There was a parallel need to ensure that while there was a requirement to act quickly to embark on new research where needed and appropriate, we also needed opportunities for the research community—both within and outside of academia—to share the burden by collectively thinking through this new context, ensuring that research responses were appropriate, ethical, and effective in providing policy-relevant findings in a timely manner. (Garthwaite et al., 2023, p. 801)

2.1 *Facilitators of Critical Consciousness*

In times of crisis, the role of the adult educator extends to that of a facilitator of critical consciousness. Drawing on Freire's (1970) pedagogy, educators are tasked with enabling learners to interrogate the socio-political contexts that underpin crises. This involves not only the dissemination of factual knowledge, but also fostering environments where learners can discuss, debate, and develop strategies for social change. By encouraging dialogue and reflection, educators help learners develop a critical understanding of their circumstances, which is essential for both personal transformation and broader societal reform.

2.2 *Agents of Change and Community Empowerment*

Adult educators are often seen as catalysts for community empowerment. In crises, where traditional social structures may be disrupted, educators provide stability and continuity. They are instrumental in mobilizing community resources, facilitating networks of support, and promoting civic engagement. This role is particularly significant in contexts where marginalized populations are disproportionately affected by socio-economic upheavals. By emphasizing

participatory learning and community-based initiatives, adult educators help to build resilient communities capable of collectively navigating crises (Cranton, 2016).

2.3 *Providers of Lifelong Learning and Skill Development*

The dynamic nature of crises often necessitates rapid adaptations in the labor market. Adult educators play a crucial role in equipping individuals with the skills necessary to adapt to new economic realities. Through targeted professional development programs, vocational training, and digital literacy courses, educators help learners to navigate economic instability and prepare for emerging opportunities. This aspect of adult education is vital for economic recovery, as it ensures that the workforce remains adaptable and capable of meeting the demands of a rapidly evolving job market (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

3 Challenges Faced by Adult Educators

3.1 *Resource Constraints and Funding Limitations*

One of the most pressing challenges for adult educators during crises is the issue of resource constraints. Economic downturns often lead to budget cuts in educational institutions, limiting the availability of materials, technology, and personnel (Brookfield, 2011). These constraints can significantly impair the ability of educators to implement innovative teaching methods and adapt to the needs of diverse learners. Funding limitations not only affect the quality of education, but also exacerbate inequities, as institutions in less affluent areas may be disproportionately impacted.

3.2 *Policy Uncertainty and Political Pressures*

Socio-economic and geopolitical crises are frequently accompanied by shifts in policy and political priorities. Adult educators must navigate a complex landscape where governmental policies may change rapidly, sometimes without adequate consultation with educational practitioners. Policy uncertainty can lead to fragmented educational strategies and undermine long-term planning efforts. Moreover, political pressures may compel educators to align their teaching with specific ideological agendas, potentially limiting academic freedom and the critical inquiry that is essential for transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000). Navigating these pressures requires a delicate balance between institutional loyalty and the commitment to fostering independent, critical thought among learners.

3.3 *Digital Divide and Technological Barriers*

The accelerated shift toward digital learning modalities during recent crises, notably during the COVID-19 pandemic, has highlighted the persistent digital divide. While technology has enabled continuity in education through online platforms, it has also exposed significant disparities in access to digital resources. Adult educators face the challenge of ensuring equitable access to technology while also adapting their pedagogical practices to suit online environments. The lack of digital literacy among certain learner populations, combined with infrastructural deficiencies, can impede the effectiveness of online education initiatives (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Consequently, educators must innovate continuously to bridge these gaps and create inclusive digital learning environments.

3.4 *Psychological and Emotional Impact*

The emotional toll of working and learning in crisis contexts is another critical challenge. Both educators and learners may experience heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout during prolonged periods of instability. The psychological burden can undermine educators' ability to engage effectively with their learners and implement innovative teaching practices. Moreover, the need to address not only academic, but also emotional well-being requires educators to develop competencies that extend beyond traditional pedagogical and andragogical skills. As highlighted by Cranton (2006), adult education in crisis contexts demands a holistic approach that acknowledges and addresses the emotional dimensions of learning.

4 Strategies for Addressing Challenges

4.1 *Adaptive Pedagogical Practices*

To address the challenges posed by crises, adult educators must adopt adaptive pedagogical and professional practices. This involves integrating flexible programmes that can respond quickly to changing socio-economic conditions. Educators are increasingly turning to blended learning models that combine face-to-face interaction with online instruction, thereby offering a hybrid approach that caters to diverse learning preferences and circumstances (Brookfield, 2011). Adaptive pedagogy also includes the use of problem-based learning and experiential learning strategies, which not only enhance learner engagement, but also develop critical thinking skills necessary for navigating complex real-world problems.

4.2 *Collaborative Networks and Partnerships*

Collaboration among educators, institutions, and community organisations is essential for mitigating resource constraints and fostering innovation. By forming communities and collaborative networks, educators can share best practices, pool resources, and develop joint initiatives that address common challenges. Partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations can also help secure additional funding and support, ensuring that educational programs remain sustainable even during periods of crisis (Cranton, 2016). Collaborative networks provide a platform for mutual support and enable educators to advocate collectively for policies that promote equitable and resilient adult education.

4.3 *Support for and Self-Care of Adult Educators*

In view of the many challenges facing adult educators, adult educators themselves are dependent on support and may need to actively seek it. Given the volatile nature of policy environments during crises, adult educators must engage in policy advocacy to secure the resources and freedoms necessary for effective teaching. By participating in policy dialogues and contributing to the development of educational frameworks, educators can help shape policies that are responsive to the needs of adult learners. Actively engaging in their own personal and professional development can strengthen adult educators' self-confidence in their own abilities, their belief that they can make a difference and their own resilience in the face of difficult or crisis-ridden circumstances. Political and social recognition of adult educators can have a supportive effect here. Support from the employers and institutions in which adult educators work is also crucial, including professional development opportunities and mental health resource. Educational institutions must recognize the unique challenges faced by adult educators and provide the necessary backing—both financially and emotionally—to sustain their efforts during turbulent times (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

4.5 *Incorporating Technology and Innovative Methods*

The rapid adoption of digital technologies in education offers both opportunities and challenges. To harness the potential of technology while addressing the digital divide, educators must be proactive in acquiring digital competencies and integrating technology into their teaching practices. This may involve the use of open educational resources (OER), virtual simulations, and interactive platforms that enhance learner engagement. However, the successful integration of technology requires ongoing investment in both infrastructure and training. As educators become more adept at leveraging digital tools, they

can create more flexible and inclusive learning environments that are better equipped to handle the uncertainties of crises.

5 Focus and Structure of the Book

In this book, we focus on the challenges and professional practice, identities and professionalisation of adult educators in different socio-cultural contexts around Europe, especially keeping in mind that there is still a lack of research and a coherent story about adult educators in Europe in time of crisis.

This book, which is partly based on empirical studies and partly on conceptual reflections, draws on various ongoing transformations and complex developments. The purpose of the book is to explore and reflect on identity issues in the context of professionalisation, agency, and social positions of adult educators in an uncertain time of crises. Crises forced adult educators to adapt their professional practice, reflect more deeply on who they are and how they might act, and change the way they work as educators in the context of crisis.

Our approach behind this book is based on socio-cultural and critical perspectives, as well as frameworks pertaining to the process of professionalisation and the formation of professional identities. The book contributes to research and discussion related to the professionalisation of adult educators and sheds light on the themes of agency, identity, professionalism, and change that adult educator in Europe are dealing with today. Two foundational aspects intersect here: self-reflection and action, or an attempt to answer not only the question, "Who am I?" but perhaps primarily, "Who am I becoming?" The contributors to the book go deeply into the arguments over professional growth, social positions, and identity formation, making direct allusions to the necessity for an ethical code of practice throughout the narratives, experiences, and professional work of adult educators in different professional contexts.

On the one hand, adult educators are responsible for creating learning opportunities and should provide learning opportunities to assist adult learners in overcoming crisis. On the other hand, educators themselves are directly affected by crises. Many adult educators face existential challenges that continuously reshape their professional identities and practices. Educators are also directly impacted by the crises as their workplace is changing, sometimes drastically.

New target groups are forming with different needs, and working conditions are changing, especially as more and more work is done digitally. Adult educators may facing existential threats. Their identity and professionalism are continually challenged by all of this.

During the crisis time the field of adult education is becoming more intricate, broad, and quickly expanding on both a professional and cross-disciplinary level. The themes and concepts covered in this book are related to adult educators' struggles and sense of self as professionals in the face of crises. Some questions are so needed and unique today (Tomczyk, 2018, p. 113). The book involves reflections on educators' professional journey, identity, and well-being issues in times of crisis. The "journey" metaphor suggests the sequential nature, continuity, and open character of different stages or periods in the identity process of educators (Tomczyk, 2018, p. 19).

Our book presents a variety of conceptual and theoretical perspectives, alongside novel research methodologies. The authors address critical questions related to professionalisation and professional adaptation in times of crisis: how can educators adapt to crises and maintain professional practice? How can they effectively respond to emerging challenges? How do crises shape professional identities and influence social positions? These questions set the stage for the chapters that follow, each offering insights into how theoretical frameworks and research methods are evolving within the field of adult education in response to contemporary challenges.

The book is organized into two main parts: Part 1 focuses on adult educators as actors in crisis management. In this part, the role and tasks of adult educators in times of crisis, the contribution they make to overcoming crises and their changing practice and understanding of their role in the face of crisis phenomena are examined.

Part 2 focuses on adult educators as those affected by crisis phenomena. The contributions examine how adult educators react to crisis phenomena and which of their own or other people's resources they can draw on.

6 The Chapters

The best way to cope with crises is to work out solutions in different communities of practice. Katrin Karu, Cynne Põldäär and Halliki Põlda (Chapter 2) based on findings from research in the Estonian context discuss the role of andragogues in communities, particularly how they manage crises, develop their professional identity, and build supportive networks. Community of practice supports and strengthens individual and collective identities, which are essential for sustainable coping and development.

Evangelia Koutoulianou and Maria N. Gravani (Chapter 3) present findings from research that explored the impact of adult educator identity on the educational design of the programmes for social change and active citizenship.

The findings revealed that prior life experiences, the influence of relatives and friends, ideology, and active participation in actions oriented to social justice lead to the formation of an identity oriented to social justice and active citizenship.

Ilona-Evelyn Rannala, Larissa Jõgi and Kristi Jüristo discuss in their chapter (Chapter 4) how crisis related to COVID-19 affected the professional practice and social positions of adult and youth education professionals. The pandemic and postpandemic time strengthened the social aspects and value-based nature of adult education and youth work, with the interactive positions of educators being most prominent.

Anna Anastasopoulou and Maria Santa (Chapter 5) discuss the findings from the study that aims to gain insights and develop a deeper understanding of the challenges adult educators experienced under unprecedented emergency circumstances. Many adult educators with no training or prior experience in online teaching had a hard time reorganising their teaching practice, transforming their learning resources and content, and inspiring and sustaining students' engagement.

Stephen O'Brien presents in his chapter (Chapter 6) an important foundation for adult educators' professional development in the 21st century. As he states "We are challenged to hold on to a meaningful narrative for ourselves; to decide "whose side we are on"". This helps us (re-)frame our 'life politics', expand our solidarity connections and value the work we do in the 'small spaces of education'.

Brigitte Bosche and Susanne Lattke (Chapter 7) examine a competence validation procedure (GRETA) for adult educators that has been introduced in Germany for some years now for its potential to empower adult educators and to strengthen their inner mental resources, which they need to cope with the manifold challenges that their professional activity entails and which are once again intensified and potentiated by the current manifold crisis phenomena.

Ukrainian education is facing unprecedented challenges due to Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine and striving to adapt to the new realities. Scholars from Ukraine Olena Anishchenko and Nataliya Avshenyuk (Chapter 8) analyse the standardisation of "Andragogue" profession in Ukraine within the professionalisation of adult education concerning instability and uncertainty in time of war in Ukraine.

Adult Education organisations and adult educators were heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic crises, and their working environment and conditions also changed dramatically due to the shift towards digital formats. Borut Mikulec (Chapter 9) discusses the professionalisation of adult educators in Slovenia as a multi-level phenomenon that interconnects macro, meso, and

micro levels and analyses how the state, adult education providers, and adult educators have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

Maria Brown (Chapter 10) discusses the findings of an exploratory action research study carried out with part-time adult education bachelor students at the University of Malta in a (post-)COVID-19 context.

The rise of the COVID-19 pandemic imposed unexpected challenges on adult education and for adult educators worldwide. Eleni Papaioannou (chapter 11) discusses the results from a case study research that aimed at exploring the experiences of adult educators working in a second chance school in Cyprus regarding the abrupt transition from the physical to the virtual classroom.

Our book ends with the final chapter that looks for insight into this volume and reflects on the chapters. Carmel Borg gives an analytical overview with critical reflections on the evolving roles of adult educators in the context of crises, challenges and educational practices. In the face of crises across Europe, adult educators are increasingly challenged to navigate shifting cultural landscapes, redefine their professional identities, and develop new strategies for managing uncertainty. This final chapter provide a critical and forward-looking perspective, emphasising how adult educators can navigate contemporary challenges, enhance their professional roles, and contribute to transformative learning experiences within diverse educational and societal contexts.

7 Conclusion

In periods of socio-economic and geopolitical crises, the roles of adult educators extend far beyond traditional teaching. They are not only knowledge transmitters, but also creators of the dialogical environment, facilitators of critical consciousness, agents of community empowerment, and providers of lifelong learning opportunities. The challenges they face—ranging from resource constraints and policy uncertainties to technological barriers and emotional stress—are significant and multifaceted. Nonetheless, these challenges also present opportunities for innovation and transformation in adult education. Adaptive pedagogical practices, professional development, collaborative networks, robust policy advocacy, and the strategic integration of technology emerge as critical strategies for overcoming the hurdles posed by crises. By embracing these strategies, adult educators can ensure that their practices remain responsive to the evolving needs of learners, ultimately contributing to the resilience and empowerment of communities during times of instability. As the global landscape continues to be marked by economic and political

turbulence, the importance of adult educators in shaping adaptive, inclusive, and critically engaged learning environments cannot be overstated.

The authors of this book pay attention to meaningful questions related to adaptation in crisis time: how to adapt to crises and act in professional practice; how to handle crises; how to shape identities and analyse the problems. Adult educators experienced during the crisis emotional and social challenges, they were required to rethink and innovate their teaching practice and develop new strategies for communication. The identity crisis among adult educators is intensified during crises, as they must adapt to changing educational landscapes and increase individual approaches to supporting adult learners. These complex challenges require adult educators a high degree of reflexivity and adaptability. The research findings discussed in this book demonstrate the breadth of the studies that offer scholars significant opportunities to express not only their research findings, but also to consider their professional values, beliefs, and positions as researchers during times of crisis. Future research should continue to explore innovative pedagogical approaches and policy frameworks that support adult education in crisis contexts, ensuring that educators are well-equipped to meet the challenges of an uncertain future.

The process of writing and editing this volume has been time consuming and demanding process, but also it was time for valuable collaboration, questioning and reflecting on realities around the world. This process was professionally very beneficial for us not only as editors but also as academics working at different universities.

We believe that this book is expected to be of professional interest to scholars and young researchers, academics and doctoral students, professionals, practitioners and policymakers from the different fields of adult education and ground for new research ideas.

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PART 1

Adult Educators' Coping with Crises

CHAPTER 2

The Role of Andragogues in Coping with Crises through a Communities of Practice

Katrin Karu, Cynne Põldäär and Halliki Põlda

Abstract

The chapter discusses the role of andragogues in communities, particularly how they manage crises, develop their professional identity, and build supportive networks. The study aims to analyze how periods of change, such as crises, influence andragogues' roles and their capacity to handle critical situations. The results indicate that communities of practice offer andragogues emotional support, shared knowledge, and opportunities for collaboration with colleagues. This support helps them manage critical situations more effectively and discover innovative solutions. The findings also suggest that professional identity, which develops within these communities, is essential for crisis resolution as it fosters resilience and problem-solving skills. The study highlights the need to develop sustainable and expanded communities of practice to support andragogues across diverse contexts, enhancing collective capacity and promoting transformative learning and professional growth in crisis.

Keywords

transformative learning – crises – professional communities – andragogical identity

1 Introduction

Society and adult education today are undergoing transformative changes, many of which are driven or accelerated by crises. Crises—whether social, political, economic, technological, or personal—require individuals and societies to reassess their values, practices, and structures (Wagoner & Power, 2021). A crisis is often experienced as a situation that exceeds one's coping resources,

and it typically demands swift action in the face of uncertainty (James & Gilliland, 2016; Vaarik, 2014).

Recent global and regional crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic disruptions, and geopolitical tensions including the war in Ukraine, have increased the need for learning, adaptation, and community-based innovation (Klaussen, 2024). In these contexts, adult educators—or andragogues—play an important role by supporting individuals and communities in navigating change and building resilience. They operate across diverse settings and target groups (Karu, 2020; Rannas, 2016), and are often the initiators of collaborative practices that help communities respond to challenges more effectively.

One effective approach that has emerged in times of crisis is the community of practice (Wenger, 1998, 2009, 2010). These communities provide a space for shared learning, emotional support, and reflection, helping professionals grow through experimentation and collaboration (Wenger et al., 2002). In crisis situations, such spaces can be especially valuable, offering a sense of belonging, strengthening relationships, and encouraging the development of new solutions (Bolisani et al., 2020; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020).

Research also suggests that interpersonal communication often breaks down during crises (Ulla & Perales, 2021), making the role of communities of practice even more significant. These communities not only support learning and reflection but also contribute to professional identity formation—particularly for andragogues—by fostering mutual trust, shared expertise, and confidence in practice (Põlda & Teidla-Kunitsõn, 2020; Karu & Aava, 2024).

This chapter explores how andragogues respond to crises and how their engagement in communities of practice supports both coping and professional development. Specifically, we examine how crises influence the professional identity of andragogues, and how communities of practice serve as a context for reflection, support, and contribution. Communities of practice are defined here as groups of individuals who share a domain of interest and engage in collective learning through experience (McDonald & Mercieca, 2021; Wenger, Trayner, & de Laat, 2011).

Our research questions are:

1. How do communities of practice support andragogues in coping with crises?
2. How do andragogues contribute to communities of practice during crisis?

In the following sections, we discuss the role of communities of practice in crisis contexts and analyze the contributions of andragogues within these collaborative learning environments.

2 The Importance of Communities of Practice in Coping with Crises

The definition of the term "community" depends on the context. According to Clark (2007), the concept of a community, as discussed by various authors, can encompass identity and belonging, inclusion and exclusion, as well as notions of place and time, and the social dimension. The defining characteristics of a community often include geographical and/or social affiliation (Savimaa & Kont, 2023). In this study, we define community as a community of practice, where a group of people gathers with shared professional interests, encompassing skills, and resources that can be utilized in preparing for, responding to, and coping with crises (McAslan, 2011). It is suggested that more mature communities might play a supporting and leading role in helping the community cope with crises (Savimaa & Kont, 2023).

In Estonia, one example of communities of practice for andragogues is the Estonian Andragogues Association, a nonprofit organization established in 2021. Membership is open to individuals with an academic education in andragogy or those pursuing it, whose activities involve the development and support of adult education (Eesti Andragoogide Liit, 2021).

According to Wenger and colleagues (2011), a community can be defined as a learning partnership among people who value learning from each other. A community of practice is characterized by shared activities where learning occurs through shared practices, creating meanings from experiences, shaping identities, and fostering a sense of belonging (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Feeling like a community member makes individuals more willing to contribute actively; this sense of belonging enhances self-confidence and solidifies self-identification, fostering emotional bonds and supporting both individual and collective identities (Jõgi et al., 2020; Randma, 2019). Communities of practice provide an environment where learning is tied to real-world problems, promoting critical thinking, reflection, and social engagement. Aharkov and colleagues (2023) emphasize the psychological readiness for change, which includes: (a) the ability to reflect, notice, and understand one's reactions and thoughts, and adjust them to changes; (b) cognitive flexibility, the ability to adapt thoughts and strategies to new situations and challenges; (c) positive thinking, the ability to see opportunities and learn from negative situations; and (d) stress management, the ability to cope with stress and maintain emotional resilience in unusual situations.

Crises can be seen as a process of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000), where the learner faces a dilemma of whether to adhere to old ways of meaning-making that have lost their usefulness or to seek new ones. This disorienting

dilemma motivates the search for new meaning schemes and identities because it involves deciding whether to remain in a world constrained by old experiences or to seek new meanings through learning that crises offer (Fleming, 2018). Thus, crises compel individuals to change their thinking and professional practices. The role of communities is to provide a safe environment for collaboration.

Communities are dynamic; people come together for common goals and then separate once those goals are achieved (McAslan, 2011). However, professional communities of practice can be considered more stable. In communities of practice, as in most social learning spaces, participation can occur at multiple levels, including core groups, coordinators, active members, peripheral members, and outsiders (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015). The challenge lies in the fact that participation requires continuous identification, engagement, and commitment, necessitating constant negotiation of learning purposes, mutual assistance, resource sharing, and maintaining the social learning space—all of which require time and dedication (Wenger et al., 2011). Research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic found that communities of practice were experienced as support groups, sources of solutions in professional activities, and learning communities supporting professional development (Ulla & Perales, 2021). Communities of practice foster the development of collective agency (Taguma et al., 2017). Coordinators need to keep the community's goals in focus and achieve results with active members while also keeping less active and peripheral members involved (Karu & Aava, 2024). This is challenging for coordinators because while allowing flexibility enables participants to contribute in their preferred ways, it is also necessary to create conditions for deep learning and coping with change, which requires active participation.

In conclusion, communities of practice support the personal and collective development of their members by providing a safe environment for exchanging experiences and testing new approaches. In crises, this collaboration becomes even more important, as joint efforts and mutual support help overcome challenges and find innovative solutions. Additionally, community support strengthens individual and collective identities, which are essential for sustainable coping and development.

3 The Formation of Andragogue Identity within a Communities of Practice

Identity can be understood as a relatively stable, meaningful, and clear understanding of oneself, one's social relationships, and one's belonging to social groups (Valk, 2003). Identity is defined on different levels: at the individual level, it represents a unique part of oneself; at the social level, it pertains to how

a person perceives themselves in a particular role or within social relationships (Ehala, 2018). On one hand, identity is a marker of culture or nationality; on the other hand, it signifies social cohesion or collective identification, including professional belonging. Professional identity, as part of social identity, is closely linked to a person's social roles and membership in the professional community (Karu, 2020; Ruijters & Simons, 2020).

The formation of professional identity is a complex process (Clarke, Hyde, & Drennan, 2013) because, while carrying out a specific role in a particular professional environment and forming various relationships, individuals carry their personal "self" and their perception of themselves within this context (Randma, 2019). Therefore, professional identity is shaped by personal, social, and professional aspects, and its formation occurs within a diverse social world (Arengo-Jones, 2019; Beijaard et al., 2004).

A professional is characterized by a commitment to continuous learning and self-development and by participation in a professional community (Ruijters & Simons, 2020). In addition to participating in a community of practice, the hallmark of a profession is also the development of this community (Gardner et al., 2005). According to Wenger's concept of a community of practice, the interaction between the individual and the group is crucial in the formation of identity (Wenger, 1998). Thus, the andragogical identity develops through social interactions in groups, including communities of practice, which offer opportunities for learning, and professional, and personal development. At the core of a community of practice are identity and practice (Tate & Jarvis, 2017). Professional identity becomes significant when belonging to a community, with community support being crucial for professional self-determination (Wenger, 1998, p. 149). Identity provides a sense of community and helps determine one's place within the community and social relationships (Kriukova et al., 2020). Professional identity is a foundation for setting long-term personal and professional goals and helps relate to the environment, organization, and personal identity (Ruijters & Simons, 2020).

The formation of an andragogical identity begins during university studies and continues throughout professional life (Põldäär, 2023). In Estonia, andragogy is studied at Tallinn University at both the bachelor's and master's levels. Since 2019, graduates have been awarded the adult educator qualification, corresponding to levels 6 and 7. Research indicates that during university studies, learner identity first develops, which is experienced as an essential resource for the formation of professional identity (Jõgeva, 2014; Karu, 2020). This process is influenced by (a) intrapersonal processes, based on individual resources, enabling reflective learning, self-awareness growth, and deep learning experiences, and (b) interpersonal processes, creating opportunities for relationships and collective resources to emerge (Karu, 2020).

When the meaning of learning expands for the learner (new dimensions open up), changes also occur in the individual's professional development (Jõgi & Karu, 2020), and their sense of professional identity deepens. Therefore, the preparation and professional development of andragogues should focus on comprehensive and continuous support that includes both personal and social aspects of learning and development. This is addressed in universities through specialized courses and small study groups. Post-university, there are opportunities to join various adult education organizations, including contributing to the Estonian Andragogues Association. The formation and self-determination of an andragogical identity are supported by continuous learning and self-development within professional communities, continuing throughout one's professional life and forming the basis for setting personal and professional goals and relating to the environment, organization, and personal identity.

4 Methodology

Given that this study aimed to discuss the role of andragogues and communities of practice in coping with crises, and to demonstrate how andragogues perceive communities of practice in shaping their professional identity, we collected qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in two stages. Initially, we interviewed eight andragogues, all alumni of the andragogy programs (both bachelor's and master's levels) at Tallinn University. These individuals—five women and three men aged between 24 and 59 years—met the criteria for purposive sampling and were selected through convenience sampling. In this phase of the interview, we explored how the identity of an andragogue is formed and developed within communities of practice. We asked participants with a degree in andragogy how they understand the identity of an andragogue and how they describe the process of becoming and developing as an andragogue within communities of practice.

In the second stage of the study, we sent written questions to all recipients who participated in the first interview, expanding on the previous topics and specifically inquiring about coping with crises. Four interviewees responded to these questions. The other four declined to participate in the follow-up interview, citing either personal obstacles or a change in their identity, which they felt excluded them from the study's target group. In the first stage of study, participants were informed verbally that the conversation would be recorded, transcribed, and subsequently anonymized. In the second stage, participants were informed in written form. Since the data is coded post-transcription, linking specific information to any individual participant will no longer be possible. Table 2.1 describes the final sample in both stages of the study.

TABLE 2.1 Overview of interview participants

Interviewee code	Degree in andragogy	Gender	Participation in first (oral) interview	Participation in second (written) interview
A1	MA	Female	Yes	No
A2	BA	Male	Yes	No
A3	BA	Female	Yes	No
A4	MA	Female	Yes	Yes
A5	MA	Male	Yes	Yes
A6	BA, MA	Female	Yes	No
A7	BA	Male	Yes	Yes
A8	BA, MA	Female	Yes	Yes

Analysing and interpreting the results, it is important to consider the small sample size typical of qualitative research. Therefore, in future studies, it would be possible to interview a larger number of people and also include an international sample.

4.1 *Data Analysis Method*

We used inductive thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) as our method for data analysis. This method involves a six-phase process: data coding, systematic organization and categorization of codes, and presentation

TABLE 2.2 Themes and sub-themes based on empirical findings

Coping with crisis	Influences of crisis on identity	Support from the CoP for andragogues in the context of crises	Contribution of andragogues to the activities of the CoP in crises
Meaning of crisis (internal and external influences)	Impact on personal level and relationships	Positive experiences	Responsibility
Activities for coping with crises	Professional benefits	Negative experiences	Level of contribution
Roles in coping with crises			Collective empowerment

of resulting categories as themes related to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the following section, we present the results to the research questions: (1) how do communities of practice support andragogues in coping with crises? and (2) how do andragogues contribute to communities of practice during crisis. The statements are illustrated with excerpts from the interviews, with the corresponding interview sequence indicated. The thematic tree that emerged is described in Table 2.2.

5 Findings

The results highlight the main themes that emerge from andragogues' descriptions of coping with crises and the formation of their professional identity within communities of practice, thereby addressing the research objective.

5.1 *Coping with Crisis*

In the findings, the crisis was described in terms of internal and external influences. Based on the descriptions of the interviewees, it emerged that a crisis can be characterized by feelings of isolation, a sense of worthlessness, prolonged hopelessness and disappointment, and negative emotions. It can also stem from one's actions or inactions, such as self-reproach over professional mistakes leading to a decrease in self-confidence and a sense of failure. Indicative is the following quote:

> A4: A crisis in professional work … means for me … a decrease in self-confidence, a sense of failure, a feeling of worthlessness, prolonged hopelessness, and disappointment.

Interviews revealed that crises are often described in terms of identity confusion and the multiplicity of roles, as andragogues frequently have to manage multiple professional roles such as teacher, adult educator, and andragogue. This identity confusion and multiplicity of roles can itself cause crises:

> A8: I had a huge crisis as a trainer within myself … and I think that was the turning point where I had to reach as an andragogue …, but when I got through it, I realized that the multiplicity of roles is what makes me the andragogue I am, this is who I am … I had to deconstruct myself layer by layer, which was not a problem for me in some ways, but it was not super comfortable either, it was an unpleasant process.

Crises can also arise from external influences, such as when there are opportunities for change, but others do not follow, or when dealing with learners of different ages with diverse habits and experiences. Work-based relationships which are characterized by dishonesty, lying, cheating, and failure to adhere to agreements were also described as crises. Additionally, the reduction in work, partners, and clients, loss of reputation, and breakdown of relationships were seen as crises:

> A4: Client dishonesty, mixing up facts, and damaging my reputation.

Non-professional communities were also seen as external influencers, where the desire to contribute is not appreciated), collaborative relationships are not successful or there is a lack of trust. This can be seen in the following quotes:

> A7: In the work collective, I can't express my thoughts in this regard …, but if you don't belong or are not part of their circle, I know that in the inner circle so to speak …, but if you are not in their group, your thoughts are worthless.

> A8: I still have to prove myself as a person in the community … it is difficult to work with trainers who are not andragogues, who still want a younger person to do their work.

The crisis was simultaneously perceived as both an opportunity and a threat; however, in both cases, it was associated with unpredictability and potential negative future scenarios. This can be seen in the following quote:

> A4: Although a crisis is seen as having both dangers and opportunities, the direction a particular crisis will take you is unknown. One must be prepared for the worst.

The analysis revealed that understanding one's own needs and the needs of others and seeing them as opportunities to move forward, help individuals cope with crises. Professional preparation supports reflection and the ability to discern what aids or hinders development, better express oneself, manage emotions, and be attentive, organized, disciplined, trusting, and analytical:

> A8: Coping is not difficult because I think through what and what I did wrong, and what I can/should do differently next time … The best thing

> that always helps me is to take a few steps back, discuss my confused thoughts with a trusted person, and analyze the situation. Trying to look at the crisis and being in it from different perspectives has usually helped; or finding the part that is good and beneficial in it.

Skills acquired during studies help in understanding and guiding people in crises. Knowledge of lifelong development and awareness of adult decision-making capabilities are considered important. An andragogical approach in various roles, and the acquired core values, help cope with crises:

> A1: Other professions may overshadow, but carrying another job title, I still rely on the core values of andragogy.

The analysis revealed that the role of an andragogue in coping with crises is considered important. It was emphasized that it is crucial to address crises from the perspective of an andragogue and use professional knowledge to tackle various challenges, understand people's emotions, obstacles, and opportunities, and help others comprehend the situation and direct further steps. Indicative are the following quotes:

> A7: The role of an andragogue in coping with crises could be to bring out the root causes of the crisis through the experiences of those involved in the crisis, which are then understood by them. And similarly, to direct further steps … Therefore, my role as an andragogue is to be the best version of myself … as an andragogue, and all good follows from that naturally.

> A4: To be a flexible responder, a creator of an ethical space where eternity, past, present, and future intertwine: listen with the heart, see, perceive the invisible, including the pain experienced by those in crisis and what they need; also see opportunities on how to move forward.

In a crisis, the role of an andragogue is perceived more clearly, and it is felt that people in the same field understand each other better. It is considered important that, as an andragogue, it is natural to let people make mistakes and thus resolve the crisis:

> A8: Let's be honest, people in the same field understand each other better and sometimes even half a word is enough … I know that persons develop throughout their life, and they are the ones who make choices and are responsible for their choices in their development. People need

to be allowed to make their own mistakes, sometimes it is the only solution in a crisis.

5.2 *Influences of Crisis on Identity*

The analysis revealed that crises are an important part of identity formation and can influence an andragogue's identity positively, and negatively, or reinforce their existing self-perception. The impact of a crisis on personal and professional levels was recognized in the findings. Recognizing a crisis allows for learning from it, making one stronger as a person:

> A8: The goal is to learn from different situations, including crises, so that next time in the same situation, there is knowledge of how to behave differently and what to do or not to do.

> A2: I no longer break down from negative feedback, but am instead grateful.

> A6: Now I accept that it is never possible to be perfect; now I enjoy the process and accept things that I cannot control.

Experiencing crises can also make one vulnerable, making interactions more cautious and conscious:

> A4: It has made me very sensitive … different experiences have taught me to be more cautious, attentive, modest, and it takes more time to build trust than before … I think more about whether, what, and how I express myself. It does not mean that I do not make mistakes, but at least I try to think more consciously and carefully about whether, what, and how I do.

When the identity of an andragogue is established, and professional skills are acquired, crises can reinforce being an andragogue and help in professional development:

> A8: I had naturally already become an andragogue on my journey. Crisis certainly have not changed my understanding of myself in this context, but I understand that many perceptions are solidified within me because I am an andragogue. By the way, there is always something good and useful in every crisis … What I have realized more clearly is that I do not fear crises; they are part of my professional development, and this is how I view the process.

> A7: This situation positively influenced me in that andragogical principles became even more ingrained in me.

5.3 *Support from the Communities of Practice for Andragogues in the Context of Crises*

Interviews revealed that support, trustful and accepting relationships, and learning together within the communities of practice are important for andragogues, especially during challenges and changes. Positive emotions and supportive attitudes, such as genuine interest, gratitude, respect, and trust, create an environment where andragogues feel included and appreciated, helping them cope with challenges/crises and opening opportunities for personal and professional growth. Belonging to a communities provides hope, belief, and strength, which are crucial for maintaining and developing a professional identity:

> A8: Sharing experiences has always been a very good opportunity to learn in my opinion. It is also good to share your experiences because it usually creates a new understanding of your own experience.

The analysis also revealed negative experiences such as alienation, rejection, insincerity, and mistrust, which can hinder coping with crises and impede an andragogue's development. It was found that community members may not show interest in each other or offer support. Interviewees mentioned experiencing hypocrisy, arrogance, superiority, and pretense, which are obstacles:

> A4: My answer may be partly unexpected and shocking …, but also lack of support, alienation, rejection, insincerity, jealousy, mistrust, lack of interest in what happened or how I can be supportive, the discrepancy between words and actions, arrogance, superiority, and pretense.

5.4 *Contribution of Andragogues to the Activities of the Communities of Practice in Crises*

Interviews indicated that andragogues feel their role during crises, taking responsibility for both their own and others' professional development. It was highlighted that their inner duty and professional knowledge prompt them to act when the situation requires it, as their andragogical preparation imposes a professional obligation:

> A2: The inner self no longer allows being careless … It is so strongly ingrained that the practice immediately comes into play, and you start applying all the knowledge you have … it is like an oath that has been taken; you cannot stand by when people are not cared for and supported.

> A3: Trust places responsibility …

Andragogues emphasize the importance of being flexible responders, listening, and collectively understanding the pain caused by a crisis. Interviewees feel more confident, able to respond to societal changes, and are not discouraged by negative feedback. They feel capable of guiding people to ask important questions and share experiences, helping them analyze and learn from crises and find solutions together:

> A7: A good andragogue values human development, guiding a person forward from point B, wherever they have reached … point B may be at different distances for everyone, but a good andragogue aims to help the person move forward from there …

Andragogues emphasize the human factor and individual understanding, recognizing that each person is at a different stage of their development and sometimes the presence and experience sharing of others helps make sense of the crisis situation. It was noted that people must take responsibility for their choices and make mistakes, as this is part of their development:

> A7: I think what distinguishes an andragogue is the strong human factor and individual understanding. I know that persons develop throughout their life, and they are the ones who make choices and are responsible for their choices in their development. People need to be allowed to make their own mistakes; sometimes it is the only solution in a crisis.

The analysis revealed that contributing to the communities of practice is important for andragogues, especially in terms of time and taking responsibility during crises. It was acknowledged that they actively participate, think critically, and draw attention to unnoticed threats and opportunities. Working together with the communities, various situations can be resolved more easily, and development occurs as sharing similar interests and professional information creates a safe environment. The positive impact on the communities aresignificant, as andragogues often serve as role models, changing the mindset of those around them and promoting collaboration:

> A8: It seems to me that I have influenced the mindset of the people around me with my example, and this has led to very nice collaborations.

At the same time, challenges and limitations in contributing were acknowledged. It was felt that they do not give back to the communities as much as

they receive, mainly due to other commitments and lack of time. There is a desire to contribute more and initiate communities themselves, but currently, there may not be enough resources or existing support structures:

> A8: Today, I feel that I would like to contribute much more to the community of practice and be more involved, but my life is currently so full of commitments that certain activities are not possible. I know that at some point there will be more opportunities for this. In the area where I live, there is currently no community of andragogues that could initiate such practices more actively.

The analysis revealed that the role of andragogue communities in society is significant, as they have the potential to exert a broader influence on the surrounding environment. Andragogues feel the need for not only their professional communities, but also broader communities encompassing diverse people and perspectives. This extended community can provide greater support and opportunities for collaboration beyond the boundaries of andragogy:

> A8: In my opinion, an andragogue needs their community, but it should be much broader today and should not be limited to the word andragogue.

> A5: … development cannot end with the university, it needs to continue from there … there should also be community interaction after university …

It was acknowledged that the sense of community was stronger during studies, and more collaboration took place, which supported the development and collaboration as an andragogue. However, after graduation, while this is still needed, they may live in areas where there is no community of andragogues. Therefore, there is a need to expand current communities and increase collaboration to achieve a similar supportive and inclusive environment. Strengthening the influence of communities can help better cope with crises and open up new opportunities for andragogues and the broader society:

> A8: Today, I think that the times during studies were very good because there was much more collaboration … In the area where I live, there is currently no community of andragogue. In my opinion, such joint activities and reflections are what unite a community.

6 Discussion

Professional identity develops through practice, sharing experiences, and reflection within communities of practice, which help andragogues make sense of their role in adult education and community development (Põldäär, 2023). The analysis shows that crises have a significant impact on the personal and professional development of interviewees, as they understand the formation and development of andragogical identity within communities of practice through various factors. Respondents find it important to be the best version of themselves, feel and show gratitude, perceive their mission and responsibility. Identity is shaped by meaningful people, professional activities, trustful and accepting relationships, learning together, time and place, and communities of practice. All these factors contribute to finding the best solutions in crises.

The study revealed that andragogues feel a strong sense of responsibility in crises, which is reflected in their professional activities. Merriam (2007) emphasizes that andragogues work in various contexts and with different target groups, being ready to use their professional skills to support and lead communities. The results show that andragogues are flexible responders during crises, actively seeking solutions and new ways of working, supported by their professional preparation and community support.

The findings indicate that communities of practice provide essential support for andragogues, helping them cope with crises and offering opportunities for professional growth. Studies by Bolisani et al. (2020) and Wenger-Trayner (2020) confirm that communities of practice strengthen relationships among community members and support a sense of belonging during crises. Therefore, the importance of communities of practice and the emotional and social support they provide are evident in both theory and this study. It is noteworthy that although communities were mostly experienced positively, negative experiences were also highlighted, making it necessary to support interpersonal processes through mutual learning in communities, enabling reflection, self-awareness growth, and deep learning (cf. Karu, 2020), which allows better understanding among community members and prevents negative experiences in community activities.

It is emphasized that the role of andragogue communities in society is significant, as they have the potential to influence the surrounding environment. It was found that andragogues need communities, not only a community of andragogues, but much broader. Both McAslan (2011) and Savimaa and Kont (2023) emphasize that more mature and broader communities are better able to support and manage coping with crises. Crises can cause transformative

learning processes where people seek new meanings and identities (Mezirow, 2000). Therefore, creating broader communities and increasing their collective capacity can help andragogues better cope with risks, opening new opportunities for both professional and personal development.

Gardner and Shulman (2005) point out that developing the community is also a characteristic of the profession. It is important to emphasize that andragogues are willing to increase their contribution in the future, actively participate in the communities of practice, and also initiate and develop communities of practice themselves. This desire and readiness to develop and contribute to the communities are consistent with theoretical positions that, on the one hand, the communities of practice provides an environment where professional identity formation is supported through learning and, on the other hand, professionals contribute to the development of the communities.

As already mentioned, the importance of the communities of practice in the professional development of an andragogue is emphasized, thus it is an important finding that the sense of community is stronger during university studies, as there is a sense of belonging and more collaboration. Therefore, more opportunities should be created during studies to join and engage in the community of practice in the field, which ensures a stronger professional identity and better coping in crisis. This need is also confirmed by the second stage of this study, where some interviewees refused to respond because they no longer identified as andragogues (only four years after graduation) and seemed to have become estranged from the community.

7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how andragogues experience and respond to crises through their participation in communities of practice. The findings indicate that crises serve not only as challenges, but as catalysts for professional reflection, identity development, and collaborative innovation. In these moments, andragogues do not act in isolation, but draw on their communities to co-create meaning, share responsibility, and explore new ways of working.

The study highlights the multidimensional role of communities of practice: they offer emotional, social, and professional support, foster mutual trust, and serve as environments for transformative learning. These elements are especially important during times of uncertainty, where professional resilience and adaptability are critical. Furthermore, the interplay between individual contribution and collective development within these communities strengthens the capacity of andragogues to support others while also shaping their own professional identity.

In summary, this chapter, underscores the vital role of communities of practice in the professional development of andragogues, particularly in times of crises. The communities not only provide emotional, social, and professional support, but serve as spaces for reflection, learning, and identity construction. The findings confirm that the ability of andragogues to respond flexibly and meaningfully to crises is closely connected to their engagement in communities of practice. Strengthening these communities—both during and after formal education—can enhance the resilience, belonging, and professional growth of adult educators.

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CHAPTER 3

Fostering Active Citizenship

An Adult Educator's Praxis with Migrant Learners in Times of Crisis

Evangelia Koutoulianou and Maria N. Gravani

Abstract

This chapter examines the crucial role of an adult educator navigating the current polycrisis (multiple interconnected societal crises), while teaching migrant adult learners. Focusing on the narrative of one adult educator, who volunteered at 'Odysseus' solidarity school in Thessaloniki, Greece, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the chapter explores two key aspects: adult educator's early life experiences and interactions at the school and how these have shaped her identity as an active citizen committed to promoting social justice; and how her experiences, ideology, and identity have influenced the design of the curriculum and her teaching practices, fostering critical consciousness and active citizenship among migrant learners. The chapter argues that amid the current crisis of democracy, exacerbated by neoliberal ideologies, the identities and pedagogical approaches of adult educators play a crucial role in shaping learners' capacity for active citizenship and democratic engagement. Ultimately, it provides a model for educators working in similarly challenging times.

Keywords

active citizenship – adult educator – identity formation – educational practice

1 Introduction

The resilience of a society during periods of crisis is profoundly influenced by its educational underpinnings. In an era where societal stability is frequently jeopardized by economic, health, and political turmoil, the role of the adult educator becomes increasingly indispensable. Furthermore, the rise of neoliberal capitalism has also been linked to a challenging crisis in democracy itself (Fejes, 2019). As the fabric of society is strained by the pressures of neoliberal ideologies, which often prioritize market forces and individual gain over

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collective well-being, adult educators stand as pillars within the community, guiding learners through the complexities of present challenges (Gounari, 2006, 2019; Grollios et al., 2015).

The rise of neoliberal capitalism has fuelled a multifaceted societal crisis, including a crisis of democracy. This crisis has shifted adult education away from its roots in social commitment towards an emphasis on employability and skills development (English & Mayo, 2012). Consequently, education is increasingly perceived as an individual responsibility for developing citizenship, rather than a collective endeavour. However, adult educators operating at the forefront of social change play a crucial role in equipping learners with the critical thinking skills necessary to navigate these complex challenges (Gounari, 2019, 2020). Furthermore, adult educators embody the change they wish to see in their communities; through their dedication to democratic principles and social justice, they model the principles of stewardship and collective response. In upholding these values, they prepare learners not just for personal betterment but for active and informed participation in democratic processes, crucial in the face of societal challenges (Grollios et al., 2015; Gounari, 2019, 2020). 'Odysseus' solidarity school in Thessaloniki, Greece, offers an alternative model of adult education, particularly for marginalized communities, emphasizing social justice and active citizenship. The COVID-19 pandemic, as a stark manifestation of the ongoing polycrisis, further underscored the importance of these alternative approaches.

Within the European Union, a debate continues regarding the transformative potential of adult education and its connection to the formation of democratic citizens. As Wildemeersch and Fejes (2018) highlight, "the perceived crisis of democracy presents a critical challenge for adult education, demanding reflection on its role and responsibilities" (p. 3). While adult education is frequently called upon to foster social cohesion and participatory practices, promoting active citizenship (Kirchgaesser, 2019), adult educators often face pressures to conform to political agendas and curricular constraints, potentially reducing learners to passive recipients of knowledge (English & Mayo, 2012).

The present chapter is part of a broader research study exploring the identity formation of five adult educators, working towards social justice, as well as their educational practice in the context of 'Odysseus' Solidarity School in Thessaloniki, Greece. 'Odysseus' serves as an educational sanctuary for migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and repatriated adults who aspire to learn new languages and secure Greek citizenship. Beyond language instruction and certification, 'Odysseus' is a vibrant hub of socialization, cultural interchange, self-expression, and creativity. It is run entirely by volunteers who are committed to social solidarity and justice, with a goal of cultivating a learning environment that inspires learners to develop a critical stance toward socio-economic

disparities. Two primary questions guide the current study: what kind of significant life events and influences have shaped the identity of the adult educators, who prioritize social justice and active citizenship? What is the impact of this developed identity on their teaching approaches and practices in the context of citizenship education?

This chapter focuses on the narrative of one of the five adult educators, named Fotini, who taught at 'Odysseus' voluntarily during the COVID-19 pandemic. It investigates, on one hand, how her early life experiences and interactions at the school have shaped her identity as an active citizen promoting social justice, and on the other hand, how her experiences, ideology, and identity have influenced the educational design and teaching practices within the school. The exploration determines whether the adult educator aligns with the skill-oriented agenda of neoliberal ideology or fosters democratic engagement and critical reflection among learners, and an understanding of education's inherent political nature (Grollios et al., 2015; Gounari, 2006, 2019, 2020).

The chapter furthermore throughs light into how she utilizes the pedagogical stance to convert classroom into a space of transformative dialogue and action, reinforcing the idea that enduring democracy relies heavily on an empowered and critically conscious citizenry (Holmes, 2020). It argues that amid the current crisis of democracy, exacerbated by neoliberal ideologies, the identities and pedagogical approaches of adult educators play a crucial role in shaping learners' capacity for active citizenship and democratic engagement.

In an era marked by economic, health, and political instability, the role of the adult educator becomes increasingly vital, guiding learners through complex challenges and resisting the pressures of neoliberal ideologies that prioritize market forces over collective well-being (English & Mayo, 2012). Focusing on the narrative of a volunteer educator at 'Odysseus' during the pandemic, this chapter is based on research that examines how her identity and pedagogy contribute to cultivating active citizenship in a time of crisis. By exploring this unique context, the research aims to provide valuable insights into the transformative potential of adult education in challenging circumstances and offer a model for educators committed to social justice and democratic values.

In the subsequent sections, we will present the theoretical framework, and the methodological approach, followed by the main findings and the conclusions.

2 Theoretical Framework

In the study we employed a framework for fostering critical active citizenship in adult education, drawing upon the complementary models of Banks (2017), Johnson and Morris (2010), and Westheimer and Kahne (2004). By integrating

transformative action (Banks, 2017), critical multicultural engagement (Johnson & Morris, 2010), and justice-oriented praxis (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) this framework offers adult educators a lens for creating empowering learning environments. Grounded in Freire's (1970) concept of problem-posing education, the framework fosters critical consciousness through dialogue and reflection, encouraging pedagogical strategies that facilitate dialogue, reflection, and praxis to empower individuals to become agents of change.

The framework is particularly well-suited for examining critical active citizenship in adult education because it centers on the transformative potential of educational practice and the crucial role of the adult educator. Critical active citizenship, as understood in this study, goes beyond mere participation in existing structures. It involves critical reflection on power dynamics, systemic inequalities, and the development of agency to challenge and transform oppressive systems. Banks' (2017) focus on culturally relevant pedagogy informs the understanding of how diverse learners engage with citizenship. Johnson and Morris' (2010) framework for critical citizenship education provides a lens for analyzing power dynamics within educational settings, while Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) typology of citizenship models helps to situate the present study within broader discussions of civic engagement.

Praxis involves empowering migrant learners to analyze their lived experiences, identify systemic challenges, and collectively develop strategies for social change. Developing critical consciousness among migrant learners involves facilitating dialogue and reflection on issues of power, marginalization, and social justice, enabling them to become active agents in shaping their own lives and communities. The frame used provides a lens for understanding how adult educators can create environments that promote active citizenship. For example, drawing on Banks' (2017) emphasis on transformative action, educators can design learning activities that encourage learners to apply critical analysis skills to real-world social justice issues, such as facilitating participatory action research projects within their communities. It also provides a theoretical basis for pedagogical strategies that encourage dialogue, reflection, and praxis. For instance, educators can utilize Freire's (1973) concept of 'problem-posing education' to encourage learners to analyze social issues through critical reflection and collaborative dialogue, rather than passively receiving information. This can be further enhanced by incorporating Johnson and Morris's (2004) emphasis on multicultural perspectives within these dialogues.

Furthermore, the proposed frame bridges theory and practice by providing concrete guidance for curriculum development, pedagogical approaches, and program design, aligning with transformative learning theory's (Mezirow, 2000) emphasis on critical reflection and perspective transformation. By

centering emancipatory learner-centered education (Borg, 2021), it also promotes a human-rights-driven approach that fosters pedagogical hospitality and empowers learners through participatory education. By explicitly addressing the role of the adult educator and the complexities of social justice education, it provides a robust foundation for the present study's exploration of critical active citizenship.

3 Methodological Framework

The methodological framework employed in this study is framed by the epistemological foundations of social constructivism and critical theory. Specifically, a biographical approach was selected to secure a profound understanding of the participant's experiences, simultaneously fostering a symmetrical relationship between the researcher and the narrative agents (Merrill & West, 2009; Creswell, 2015; Merrill, 2020).

Acknowledging the plurality of ways individuals interpret their social realities, the biographical approach has proven invaluable. It enables an authentic excavation of personal narratives, which, in turn, unveil the complex layers of meaning attributed by individuals to salient life episodes (Merrill, 2019, 2020; Alheit, 1995). This biographical approach facilitates a nuanced appreciation of the dialectical interplay between the individual's narrative and the overarching societal structures, attentive to the specific historical, cultural, and social contexts that shape individual trajectories.

The biographical approach elucidates how societal constructs of class, gender, nationality, and educational background intersect with personal history, illuminating pervasive issues of inequality. Thus, it harbors potential for expanding our understanding of social phenomena, repurposing individual experiences as political narratives aimed at fostering social justice (Wright, 1970, as cited in Merrill, 2020; Rustin, 2000, as cited in Chamberlayne et al., 2000).

At its core, biographical inquiry foregrounds human experience, positing meaning and subjectivity as the essential constituents of one's identity. For researchers and adult educators alike, this offers a profound insight into the complexities of adult learning, creating knowledge within a collaborative and egalitarian framework. In concluding, the biographical approach emerges as the apt modality for documenting the experiences, perspectives, and introspections of study participants. While focusing on the individual narrative, it gracefully situates the individual within a specific historical, cultural, and social context. Significantly, this approach actively challenges societal inequities and

strives towards social justice, aligning with the political aims upheld by feminist and critical scholars (Merrill, 2020; Barabasch & Merrill, 2014).

Following the above, the methodology was designed to provide a rich, contextual understanding of identity formation within 'Odysseus' solidarity school and its impact on educational praxis. Data of the broader study, part of which is what it is presented in the chapter, was collected in May and June 2021 through biographical interviews (Barabasch & Merrill, 2014). Biographical interviews (Barabasch & Merrill, 2014) were conducted with five participants to gather in-depth life stories of their life experiences and professional journeys. The analysis presented here draws upon the life story of Fotini, a pseudonym used for an adult educator purposively selected from a broader group of educators engaged in citizenship education. Fotini was chosen due to her extensive experience, her demonstrated commitment to social justice, and her willingness to reflect on both her personal and professional journey. These qualities made her an ideal representative of the subset of adult educators who integrate social justice and active citizenship into their teaching practices. Fotini, a retired educator from western Thessaloniki, comes from a family that values education. Her early experiences in secondary education sparked a growing political awareness, which has since influenced her teaching career. Throughout her career, she has integrated active citizenship and societal transformation into her pedagogy, fostering a classroom environment grounded in democratic values and mutual respect.

Fotini was informed well in advance about the study's objectives, the biographical nature of the interview and the fact that she had to narrate her life story up to the interview. She was promised confidentiality and anonymity. These were assured and maintained through pseudonym and participant-chosen interview location. High-quality recording ensured accurate transcription, which was reviewed by the participant for accuracy and representation. While revisions were allowed, substantial changes were collaboratively discussed to balance narrative integrity with participant's voice. Finally, the participant reviewed the final paper before publication. This transparency upheld ethical standards and enhanced validity by ensuring participant's ownership of her narrative.

The analysis of the empirical data, which consisted of a single biographical interview, followed a six-phase inductive thematic analysis approach, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The six phases were as follows:

The recorded interview was transcribed verbatim, capturing the nuances of Fotini's spoken language (Transcription). The transcribed interview was read and re-read multiple times to gain a deep understanding of Fotini's narrative, experiences, and the context surrounding them (Familiarization). Then codes were inductively generated directly from the data (Generating Initial Codes),

identifying interesting features of the narrative related to the research questions. These codes emerged organically from Fotini's life story rather than being imposed based on pre-conceived categories. Later, initial codes were grouped into potential themes based on shared meanings and patterns. This involved actively searching for connections and relationships between the codes. Then, the identified themes were reviewed in relation to the entire data set (the transcribed interview) to ensure they accurately reflected the nuances and complexities of Fotini's narrative. This involved refining the themes, splitting overly broad themes, and merging similar themes where appropriate (Reviewing Themes). Lastly (Defining and Naming Themes), each theme was clearly defined and given a concise, descriptive name that captured its essence. This involved further refining the themes and ensuring they were coherent and distinct. The final themes and their supporting data extracts were then presented in the analysis.

4 Findings and Discussion

The thematic dissection of the narrative data resulted in the identification of two salient themes: the experiences prior to 'Odysseus' and the Impact of identity on educational practice for citizenship education. These emergent themes were not compartmentalized into discrete categories. Rather, they were examined as integral components of the autobiographer's narrative, with a critical lens applied to their relation and relevance to the subject's broader life journey. The analysis recognized these thematic strands as reflections of the narrative actor's identity and its interplay with the accumulated experiences, aligning with the argument posited by Barkoglou and Gravani (2020) that life stories and identity are inexorably linked within educational contexts. The biographical approach used here centers on the life story of Fotini. It treats the individual's recounted life story as the primary data source, aiming to understand her experiences, perspectives, and how she makes meaning of her life within a specific social and historical context. Essentially, the biographical approach is the exploration and analysis of a life narrative. It values the subjective experiences of the individual and recognizes the narrative as a co-constructed process between the interviewer and the participant.

4.1 *Experiences Prior to 'Odysseus'*

Empirical research delineates that the catalysts for cultivating proactive individuals committed to social justice predominantly include the influence of significant others, direct experiences of injustice, and ideological frameworks. Klandermans (1984) classifies identification with a group and adherence to an

ideology as primary motivators for participation in activism. More specifically, the activation of politicized identity, a form of self-concept imbued with political significance towards social issues, emerges as a significant driver for engaging in activism (De Weerd & Klandermans, 1999; Stürmer & Simon, 2004).

Within the context of Fotini's life story, a salient aspect is her politicized interpretation of societal challenges. The following declaration captures a profound familial tradition of engagement with societal matters, reflecting an enduring vigilance towards social inequities.

> I must acknowledge … my family and I … we are deeply politicized. To me, this is exceedingly significant. We have never been detached from worldly affairs. We have always stood in solidarity with the global community.

Fotini's life story serves as a compelling illustration of the theory that politically conscious individuals are often driven to act toward social justice and contribute to societal change. The existing body of socio-political literature consistently highlights the critical role of early experiences, influential role models, and encounters with injustice in shaping an activist ethos. Authors like De Weerd and Klandermans (1999) and Stürmer and Simon (2004) have elucidated how deeply held ideological convictions can drive individuals to partake in social justice initiatives. Activism is frequently ignited by a strong political identity that discerns and is motivated by the recognition of societal inequalities.

Her path to becoming a committed participant in political and social issues can be traced back to her upbringing in a family that championed democratic ideals, revered education, and emphasized critical reflection. Fotini's formative environment was imbued with educational emphasis, laying the groundwork for her evolving perspectives and values (Anderson & Marshall, 2009).

At the heart of Fotini's life story is her mother's exemplarity as a pillar of support and activist engagement. In the tumultuous era of the late 1970s, her mother's unwavering dedication to social justice was not just symbolic; it was manifested in concrete actions, such as providing social and financial aid to a young student mother. This act of support carved a path toward embracing racial and cultural diversity at a time marked by considerable social strife and opposition to such inclusiveness.

The enduring influence of Fotini's mother on her commitment to social justice is captured in Fotini's own words, as she reflects on her mother's exceptional character:

> My mother exemplified the ideals of her era. She offered more than just material support, becoming a steadfast beacon of empathy for those

> around her. Her support during the challenging years of 1975 to 1980 stood out for its fearless celebration of diversity. She steadfastly stood by a student mother in a biracial relationship, an act that was as much about crossing emotional as it was racial boundaries.

Moreover, Fotini's educational journey, during a time of political turbulence, played a crucial role in moulding her sense of identity. She recounts receiving an education that was remarkably forward-thinking given the era's political censorship. Her teachers, operating covertly under the shadow of the Greek Junta's repression, endeavored to expand learners' cognitive capacities and encourage independent thought. Fotini reflects:

> My youth was marked by the rarity of having educators who dared to go beyond the prescribed subjects of history, mathematics, physics, and ventured to challenge our understanding of the world. In the midst of a repressive regime, they bravely inspired a discourse on discerning the truth beneath appearances.

These influential figures left such a mark on Fotini that they shaped her own approach to teaching. She describes her initial steps in the education field with great reverence for her former teacher:

> When I began teaching, I vividly remember channelling the presence of my secondary school philologist in my first lessons, an individual who taught me the profound value of honoring each student's voice.

Fotini's career in education is defined not just by her exemplary teaching, but also by her active involvement in movements aimed at advancing the professional development of educators. Her dedication was reflected in both her protest action and her pedagogy. She speaks proudly of her role:

> I actively contributed to efforts aimed at improving our teacher training system and was part of the push to amalgamate pedagogical faculties within our universities—an integral step forward for the pedagogical growth of aspiring teachers.

Through these recollections, Fotini's narrative ties her personal growth and professional evolution to a broader context of social activism and educational reform, illustrating the profound interplay between individual identity and collective struggles for educational and societal betterment. Fotini's instructional

philosophy is deeply intertwined with the tenets of Critical Pedagogy, viewing education as an inherently political endeavor. Rooted in a lineage shaped by critical theorists, her approach is carefully crafted to expand her learners' understanding of the world, encouraging deep engagement with socio-political contexts. Fotini expresses this conviction thusly:

> Comprehending one's pedagogic responsibility is crucial … I've come to understand that education is intrinsically connected to politics and has the capacity to either reinforce or substantially alter prevailing structures.

Her aspiration to deliver "an education that broadens perspectives" reflects a commitment to equipping learners with the critical tools needed to analyze and transform the societal norms that surround them.

For Fotini, a teacher's proficiency is defined by a recognition of their inherent responsibility to nurture critical awareness and facilitate societal transformation. Her reflections underscore the notion of educators as important actors in societal development, tasked with cultivating critical thinking and active citizenship in learners.

Her unwavering dedication to professional growth and pedagogical advancement is reflective of her rigorous engagement with scholarly works, aiming to refine her teaching practice in service of fostering an invigorating, citizenship-focused learning environment. In Fotini's championed educational space, democratic values such as reciprocal respect and collective participation are paramount, reflecting her firm belief in the significant societal impact of educational practice.

Her educational ethos, as delineated in the discussions above, paints a vivid picture of a teacher who persistently pursues knowledge, champions the evolution of teaching methods, and strives to create a classroom culture anchored in democracy. Fotini's story exemplifies a vision of education that transcends the simple transfer of knowledge, seeking instead to cultivate learners as autonomous, critically-minded individuals who can effectively navigate and influence their social environment.

Therefore, Fotini's narrative foregrounds the ideological framework that underpins her pedagogical stance and the transformative objectives she envisions for her learners, aligning with current discussions in education regarding the role of educators as agents of change.

4.2 *Impact of Identity on Educational Practice*

Fotini places significant emphasis on the curriculum's centrality in nurturing active democratic citizenship, aligning with the scholarly positions of Olson et al. (2015). These researchers advocate for a curriculum that is deliberately

designed to incorporate citizenship education, fostering active democratic citizenship through pedagogical practices that reflect democratic values. In the context of the 'Odysseus' school, Fotini notes the practical manifestation of these principles. The school exemplifies a democratic community where core values such as mutual respect, collective engagement, and voluntary participation are practiced and upheld. Within this framework, literacy extends beyond traditional definitions to include fostering learners' autonomy, sense of community, and their abilities to enact change.

Fotini highlights the 'Odysseus' school as a dynamic learning environment, a microcosm of society founded on deep-seated democratic philosophy. She explicates:

> At the core of 'Odysseus' lies the essence of democracy—robust interactions between educators and learners, the embrace of diverse perspectives, and above all, a culture of volunteering.

In this depiction, Fotini paints a vibrant picture of the school's ethos, viewing it as a harmonious space where contribution and receptivity intertwine seamlessly within daily school life, facilitating profound individual and communal advancement.

Thus, in her reflections, Fotini weaves a connection between theoretical concepts of active citizenship education and tangible illustrations from the school setting, underscoring the vital function that educational institutions serve in fostering civic values and responsibilities among learners.

Fotini advocates for a comprehensive educational experience that goes beyond the traditional bounds of literacy, suggesting that the 'Odysseus' school's overarching ethos and structural organization play a crucial role in promoting transformative and critical awareness among learners. The educators' dynamic engagement with pedagogical practices and their commitment to democratic values shape a learning atmosphere that emphasizes personal growth alongside collective engagement, equipping learners for active participation within various societal contexts.

She highlights the school's inclusive philosophy, emphasizing that education cannot be compartmentalized or isolated. 'Odysseus' focuses on recognizing and celebrating its multinational makeup, fostering an environment where global citizenship and awareness are central. This inclusive approach equips learners to confront and dismantle racial and ethnic biases, fostering a sense of community that challenges exclusionary ideologies.

Fotini's educational methodology for teaching Greek at intermediate levels B and C is inspired by Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy, mirroring the stages of his adult literacy programs outlined in his 1976 works. Her teaching strategy

reflects Freire's stages, underscoring her commitment to critical educational principles.

Central to Fotini's approach is moving away from conventional textbook-centric teaching, aiming instead to cultivate a critical consciousness among learners, reflecting a core aspect of Freire's philosophy. She states:

> Pedagogical practices at 'Odysseus' emphasize democratic values and cultural sensitivity.

This necessitates that Adult Educators appreciate and draw upon the diversity within the student body and themselves, fostering a learning space that thrives on collective experiences and goals.

In her classes at varying levels (B1, B2, C1), Fotini adopts a text-based approach that spurs learners to grapple with societal matters, thereby nurturing their ability to think independently and critically. This method is designed to endow learners with the analytical capacity to scrutinize social issues critically and to actively pursue change, highlighting the role of adult education in enhancing community cohesion and democratic participation. This ties into the concept of "active critical citizenship", a view espoused by scholars such as Wildemeersch and Fejes (2018), which underscores the importance of adult education as a formative influence on community involvement and proactive civic engagement.

Fotini's choice of educational material is heavily influenced by her belief in Critical Pedagogy, which regards education as a vehicle for social change. As Critical Pedagogy views education as a political act (Brookfield, 2018; English & Mayo, 2012; Formenti & West, 2018), Fotini uses this lens to select texts that challenge and inspire learners to reevaluate the ideologies and experiences that shape their lives.

Fotini recognizes the political essence of literacy, acknowledging how it can perpetuate or challenge existing social narratives. Her approach to literacy instruction aims not only to cover the basic skills of reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary, but to engage learners in social issues, encouraging them to become agents of change in their communities. She aims to transform learners' worldviews by confronting the passive acceptance of ideas ingrained through cultural conditioning. She states:

> The recognition of literacy's non-neutrality and its politically charged dimensions guide my pedagogical strategies toward a socially engaged literacy practice.

She advocates for a form of literacy deeply connected with learners' active participation in society. This transformative practice is intended to shift learners' perspectives, which they might have previously considered fixed due to societal norms.

In her curriculum planning for 'Odysseus', Fotini takes a deliberate and thoughtful approach to crafting transformative learning experiences. She incorporates Paulo Freire's concept of the 'thematic universe', a strategy for engaging with learners' preconceived notions and worldviews through their use of language. Fotini's exercises are designed to connect personal life experiences with larger societal contexts, with the objective of demonstrating that reality is malleable and subject to change through collective human action. She draws on the work of educational scholars such as Grollios et al. (2015) and Gounari (2019) to inform her practice, which is directed toward realizing this dynamic vision of education for her learners.

Fotini underlines the significance of engaging in ongoing conversations with learners to unravel their 'thematic universe', which comprises their interests, concerns, and lived experiences. These discussions take place not only within the structured environment of the classroom, but in the school's informal settings. Such dynamic interactions allow educators at 'Odysseus' to tap into the topics that most resonate with learners, which in turn, can critically inform the teachers' approach to addressing learner-specific themes and issues. She commented:

> To figure out what really matters to learners … their 'thematic universe' … we, the educators, need to talk with them both in and out of class. By paying attention to these conversations all around the school, educators can discover the topics learners are truly interested in. This understanding will help us better explore what learners care about and want to learn.

In her efforts to map out the 'thematic universe' of her learners, Fotini emphasizes the importance of comprehending their diverse cultural, social, and educational backgrounds, as well as their individual literacy necessities. This comprehensive understanding enables her to tailor lessons that are not only academically fitting, but personally relevant and engaging to the learners.

Fotini's approach to selecting curricular texts reflects a deep-rooted humanistic pedagogy, drawing inspiration from the educational philosophies of Paulo Freire (1973). Embracing a humanistic outlook, adult educators like Fotini aim to foster in their learners the belief that they can effect positive change in the world through their actions.

Fotini elaborates on the adult educator's role, which is to connect learners' personal experiences ('biocosm') with the broader, changeable, and social reality.

> Uncovering the 'thematic universe' of the learners sheds light on their biocosm, and it is imperative for the adult educator to link this personal realm with the fluidity of social realities.

This connection is particularly crucial when dealing with adult migrants, emphasizing the empowerment that comes with understanding one's role in societal change through active citizenship. She expounds:

> Investigating the 'thematic universe' of the learners uncovers their biocosm. It is incumbent upon the adult educator to facilitate the connection of this personal cosmos with the mutable social reality. The educator must impress upon learners, particularly adult migrants, the potential for societal transformation inherent to active citizenship.

Her educational methodologies are firmly aligned with Freire's (1976) vision of dialogic pedagogy, which considers dialogue essential for the development of critical consciousness and subsequent revolutionary praxis—an interplay of reflection and action. Fotini values dialogue not just as a tool for conveying knowledge, but as a vital process in fostering a formative educational relationship where both teacher and student learn and grow together through their interactions.

Fotini's pedagogical response to the remote learning challenges brought about by the pandemic demonstrates adaptability and a commitment to Critical Pedagogy's principles. Recognizing that traditional engagement methods may be constrained in a virtual setting, she focuses on facilitating the discussions around contemporaneous social concerns that resonate with learners' lives. Issues such as immigration and peace in times of global conflict become focal points for fostering critical thought and reflective learning, which are especially pertinent during a time of global upheaval.

She encourages the use of multimodal texts in her teaching, blending visual and textual elements to capture learners' attention and maintain relevance to their personal interests. Learners are prompted to contribute materials, ensuring that the curriculum resonates with them on an individual level.

Fotini places significant emphasis on examining texts through multiple lenses, including authorial background, historical context, and linguistic choices. This rigorous analytical practice aligns with her belief that deeper

engagement with the text is necessary to foster a critically conscious understanding of the material:

> I envisage texts as possessing a stratification that invites interpretive exploration. An initial perusal yields immediate comprehension; however, engaging in critical depth requires contemplation of a multitude of factors—authorship, historical context, stylistic and linguistic selections. This level of scrutiny is essential for both educator and learner to engage in toward achieving a critically conscious understanding of textual material.

Learners are then encouraged to draw on intertextuality, connecting the primary text they study with their personal experiences and a range of secondary materials. This pedagogical technique promotes a multifaceted understanding and a critical perspective that inspires active and informed participation in civic life (Lucio-Villegas et al., 2016; Holmes, 2020). Her methods resonate with Freire's (1970) emphasis on education as a transformative practice, where critical awareness and active engagement are key to personal and societal growth.

This transformative educational experience reflects the broader impact that the 'Odysseus Solidarity School' aims to have on trainees' cultural preferences and political or ideological orientations. Engagements with various forms of cultural expression, such as literature, academic work, cinema, and theatre, indicate an evolving worldview shaped by education and critical inquiry.

The transformative power of adult education becomes evident when Fotini illuminates the profound transformation of an Albanian learner at the 'Odysseus' solidarity school, who overcame her initial fears of exclusion through active involvement in the program. Her educational journey is distinguished by her growing engagement with the community, as she assumed significant roles such as a teacher for children and an influential community figure. From a place of initial reservation, her commitment to the program catalyzed a personal evolution marked by enhanced civic engagement and a spirit of solidarity. This narrative stands as compelling evidence of the empowerment that is fostered by the 'Odysseus' educational approach and underscores the powerful role of adult education in driving both personal growth and communal enrichment.

The relationship between citizenship and adult education is crucial, as argued by Fejes (2019), for the development of democratic citizenship. Education is not just an individual pursuit; it's a collective journey that enhances civic belonging. Empirical examples from Lucio-Villegas et al. (2016) further support the notion that collaborative educational practices can profoundly influence individuals' development in the sphere of citizenship. Through

these practices, education becomes a powerful conduit for fostering a sense of agency and belonging among adult learners.

5 Conclusion

In times of crisis, the role of adult education becomes even more crucial. By embracing an emancipatory learner-centered approach (Borg, 2021), adult educators can empower learners to navigate the challenges they face, build resilience, and become active citizens who contribute to creating a more just and equitable society for all. This is not merely a pedagogical imperative, but a moral one, demanding a commitment to social justice, human dignity, and the transformative power of education.

The findings from the current study, which explored the interconnectedness of life story and identity of an adult educator within the educational context of 'Odysseus', offer valuable insights into the practical application of the proposed theoretical framework, particularly with migrant learners. Our research highlights the importance of understanding learners' diverse backgrounds, literacy needs, and prior experiences, including the influence of significant others and direct experiences of injustice. These insights resonate strongly with the principles of critical multicultural engagement advocated by Johnson and Morris (2010), emphasizing the need for culturally responsive teaching practices that validate learners' identities and lived experiences. Furthermore, Fotini's emphasis on connecting learners' personal experiences with broader social realities aligns with Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) concept of justice-oriented praxis, empowering learners to analyze root causes of injustice and develop strategies for systemic transformation.

The study's findings also underscore the crucial role of adult educators in facilitating dialogue, reflection, and praxis. By creating opportunities for learners to share their life stories and connect them to broader social issues, educators can foster critical consciousness and empower learners to become active and engaged citizens who contribute to the social transformation. Fotini, similar to Banks (2017) puts emphasis on transformative action by encouraging learners apply critical analysis skills to real-world justice issues. This is particularly relevant for adult migrant learners, who often bring a wealth of lived experiences that can enrich classroom discussions and contribute to a deeper understanding of social justice issues.

Furthermore, Fotini's educational methodology, deeply rooted in Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1973), offers a transformative approach to adult education, particularly for migrant populations (Borg, 2021). Her praxis demonstrates a commitment to transformative learning experiences that

empower learners to become active and critically engaged citizens (Shih, 2018). Several key aspects of her approach resonate with Freire's philosophy.

Firstly, Fotini's text-based approach, centered on societal issues, cultivates critical thinking, aligning with Freire's vision of education as a catalyst for social transformation (Freire, 1976). By confronting learners with complex issues, she disrupts passive acceptance of established norms, fostering a more critical worldview. This resonates with Freire's concept of conscientização—consciousness-raising—which emphasizes developing critical awareness of social, political, and economic realities (Freire, 1976). Furthermore, Fotini's use of multimodal texts and encouragement of learner contributions enriches the learning experience. Incorporating diverse perspectives and modes of expression creates a dynamic and engaging environment that recognizes learner agency and ownership, echoing Freire's emphasis on dialogue and collaboration (Freire, 1976). Her focus on examining texts through multiple lenses—authorial background, historical context, and linguistic choices—promotes a critically conscious understanding. Encouraging learners to connect primary texts with personal experiences and secondary materials through intertextuality deepens their understanding and cultivates critical thinking skills, reflecting Freire's call for critical engagement with texts and the world (Reddie, 2018).

Secondly, Fotini's emphasis on understanding learners' "thematic universe"—the interconnected web of their lived experiences, cultural background, and personal values—highlights the importance of connecting learning to those experiences that are relevant and meaningful to learners. This echoes Freire's belief in the importance of dialogue, collaboration, and problem-posing education in the learning process (Freire, 1976). By engaging in ongoing conversations with learners, both inside and outside the classroom, she ensures that the curriculum resonates with their interests, concerns, and experiences. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and relevance, empowering learners to connect their personal experiences to broader social contexts. Moreover, by connecting personal experiences with larger societal contexts, she helps learners see the connections between their own lives and the world around them (Gorodetsky et al., 2003). This approach fosters a deeper understanding of social issues and empowers learners to become agents of change. Fotini's methods resonate with the principles of Emancipatory Learner-Centered Education (Gravani et al., 2024), emphasizing empowerment and social transformation through education. This approach recognizes the inherent strengths and resilience of learners, valuing their lived experiences and empowering them to become active participants in shaping their own futures and contributing to the broader community. It requires a commitment to creating inclusive and equitable learning environments that foster critical thinking, intercultural dialogue, and collaborative action (Borg, 2021).

Fotini's adaptability, particularly during challenging circumstances like the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrates her commitment to maintaining the principles of Critical Pedagogy. By adapting her methods to different learning environments, she ensures learners continue to have access to transformative learning experiences. Her work serves as a compelling model for educators striving to cultivate active citizenship and social change within adult education, particularly among migrant populations. It underscores the importance of not only equipping learners with essential skills, but also inspiring them to challenge oppressive systems and advocate for social justice.

Adult education, grounded in critical pedagogy, becomes a powerful catalyst for social change, especially in times of crisis. It empowers learners to critically examine societal structures, challenge oppressive norms, and become active participants in shaping a more just and equitable world. By fostering critical consciousness, adult education equips individuals with the tools to analyze power dynamics, question dominant narratives, and advocate for transformative change. This transformative potential is realized through dialogical engagement, praxis-oriented approaches, and the integration of learners' lived experiences. The curriculum becomes a space where personal narratives intersect with broader social contexts, fostering a sense of agency and inspiring collective action. Ultimately, adult education, informed by critical pedagogy, plays a vital role in cultivating informed, engaged citizens capable of contributing to a more democratic and inclusive society. The educators within this framework are not merely transmitters of knowledge, but facilitators of critical reflection and empowerment, guiding learners towards a deeper understanding of their own potential and their capacity to effect meaningful change.

The findings of the current study offer a valuable roadmap for adult educators seeking to promote critical active citizenship among migrant learners. By incorporating participatory methodologies, critical reflection, and culturally responsive teaching practices, adult education can play a vital role in empowering migrant learners to become agents of change and contribute to building a more just and equitable society. Further research should explore the long-term impact of this framework on migrant learners' civic engagement and its applicability in diverse educational settings.

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CHAPTER 4

Adult Educators and Youth Workers Practising during Crisis

Strengthening Social Positions

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Abstract

Adult and youth education is a heterogeneous "landscape" characterized by complex social, educational, and learning practices and internal and external social relations. This chapter is based on findings from two studies based on the social constructionism approach. The chapter highlights the social positions of educators and the views of managers working with educators by focusing on the following research questions: How have the changing circumstances of crisis influenced the social positions? How did adult educators and youth workers shape and re-shape social positions in their professional practice during the crisis? Field and position theories have been used to analyse social positions. Empirical data was collected using semi-structured and focus group interviews and analysed using thematic analysis and the portrayal method. The findings highlight that the social positions crystallised and became stronger during the crisis and were in coherence with real adjustments carried out in the professional practice of educators. The crisis forced rapid adjustments in how educators and youth workers approached their practice.

Keywords

adult and youth education – educators – social positions – crisis

1 Introduction

Adult and youth education professionals influence social and educational processes in society, facilitate the learning processes, and support learners in different learning settings and educational environments. Learning should not only be confined to institutional boundaries, and could be seen in different settings. For instance, the discussions around the importance of non-formal learning

have been necessary for several reasons: to question the (economic) sustainability of formal education and see non-formal learning as an alternative or complementing form to expand the learning needs of various target groups, mitigate inequalities, enhance social welfare, increase the engagement of target groups, and ensure equal access to education and flexible educational programs (Karu et al., 2019). Adult education and youth work can be viewed as non-formal learning practices. Non-formal learning is learner-centered, flexible, and universal, aiming to ensure free access to education regardless of the learner's age and social background (Gustavsson, 2000). The belief that learning should not be confined to institutional boundaries is strongly endorsed in strategic documents, which advocate for integrating formal and non-formal learning pathways and enhancing the variability of non-formal learning (Education Strategy, 2021–2035). However, research indicates that trust in educators who work in non-formal settings among representatives of formal education remains a significant issue (ICF, Praxis, Tallinn University & Civitta Estonia, 2022).

Adult and youth education is a heterogeneous "landscape" and non-formal learning settings characterized by complex social, educational, and learning practices, internal and external social relations. Social relations are constitutive of social positions (Martins, 2022). Therefore, the investigation of social positions of educators is important. Social position refers to the position of the given individual or group in the system of social relations, such as interest relations and social power relations. Social positions describe the social status of practice, and are communicated to others through interaction, different symbols, choices and values (Bourdieu, 2003). Social positions are usually rather complex, and a given individual's revealed social position may differ depending on which social relations with other individuals or groups are considered (Farkas, 2022).

This chapter is based on findings from two research projects: "Meanings of non-formal learning from the perspectives of practice and practitioners" (Karu et al., 2019) and "Digital leap in the youth sector" (2023) and highlights the social positions of educators working in non-formal learning settings by focusing on the research questions: how have the changing circumstances of larger scale crisis (COVID-19, mental health's crisis, war in Ukraine) have influenced the social positions of educators? How did adult educators and youth workers shape and re-shape social positions in their professional practice during the crisis? We aim to explore the social positions and understand what is important and valuable for educators during the crisis. All the participants we met during the interviews have a unique and powerful voice based on a strong professional mission and social positions.

2 Background and Context

Estonia, a nation with a population of 1.3 million, has experienced significant historical transitions, including occupation by the Soviet Union and substantial transformations following the restoration of its independence in 1991. Before the Soviet occupation, both adult and youth work in Estonia was akin to the practices in Nordic countries, functioning as integral components of the non-formal education and socio-cultural processes. During the Soviet era, adult education and youth work were influenced ideologically and remained at a standstill for almost fifty years. Many of the specific types of adult education and youth work practiced before the Soviet occupation, such as study circles and folk schools for adults, youth organizations and camps for youth, were carried on, but molded to suit the communist ideology and message. As further alternative, folk universities for adults and hobby schools for youngsters emerged, which added some value to adult education and youth work in Estonia during the Soviet era. Folk universities, adult education centres, informal learning courses for adults and hobby schools, which still exist today alongside formal adult education and youth centres, are places for pursuing specific interests and have different programmes and curricula for different learning interests and hobbies together with a rather structured learning process (Rannala & Allekand, 2018; Jõgi, 2023).

The Adult Education Act (1993, 2004, 2015, 2019) and Professional Qualification Standards provide the legal bases for the field of adult education and adult educators in Estonia. The profession of adult educators in Estonia has been recognized and regulated by the Professional Qualification Standards since 2004. Professional qualification in this context is defined as an additional partial qualification and applying for the qualification is voluntary for adult educators. Youth work in Estonia is framed legally within the Youth Work Act (1999, 2010) and has been supported by the Occupational Standard of Youth Workers since 2006, as well as higher education programmes at universities and different training options outside academia—these possibilities are voluntary and it is possible to enter a job as a youth worker without prior qualification. Both adult educators and youth workers in Estonia have professional organizations with long histories and training possibilities (Teder, 2017; Jõgi, 2023).

Drawing from the occupational framework and the well-established tradition of academic training for adult education and youth work in Estonia, bolstered by the presence of established professional bodies, it can be asserted that both sectors uphold robust professional traditions and values. Adult educators and youth workers share similar professional values, positioning both

fields as rooted in values-based practices (Sercombe, 2018; Karu & Jõgi, 2014; Jõgi & Karu, 2020). The values embraced by youth workers underscore their dedication to inclusive, empowering, and supportive approaches that prioritiies the needs and interests of young individuals (Rannala et al., 2024). Likewise, the core values of adult educators echo this commitment to inclusivity and learner-centeredness (Karu & Jõgi, 2014; Jõgi, 2023). Consequently, the dispositions acquired through formal education, along with beliefs about the hierarchical structure of the educational field, coexist with the values, beliefs, and behaviors endorsed by the professional community of adult educators and youth workers. This coexistence may give rise to tensions when shaping and reshaping social positions.

3 Theoretical Considerations

In analyzing the social positions of adult educators and youth workers, we have been guided by the considerations from the field theory (Bourdieu, 2003) and position theory (Davies & Harré, 1990, 1999; van Langenhove & Harré, 1999; Martin & Gillespe, 2013). Bourdieu`s concept of the field refers to the social space within which individuals and institutions compete for symbolic and material resources (Bourdieu, 2003). We are based on the understanding that adult and youth education is seen as a social space that holds relations, shapes positions and affects positional choices of educators in a particular professional context and particularly in situations of change or crisis that sustain different orientations, professional, personal, and future perspectives, roles, values, and beliefs (Jõgi et al., 2024). Bourdieu stresses however, that although dispositions as internalized values affecting behaviour are the products of socialization, cultural norms and regulations, which become part of our being and this way tend to reproduce the same structures, imbalances and inequalities, it is not constant or unchangeable. Adult educators and youth workers can take up an agency and start to reshape their objective positions by accumulating available capitals such as social capital through collaboration and networking or cultural capital like ongoing learning, reflective practice, or symbolic capital like lobbying for recognition and benefits (Bourdieu, 1990; Coburn, 2011).

The concept of positioning is related to positioning theory and provides the analytical means for understanding social positions. Positioning theory frames ways of examining position and positioning relationships as dynamic and developing within and across time, events/episodes, and configurations of actors, social spaces and social contexts (Green et al., 2020, p. 119). Position can be defined as collections of beliefs that individuals have. Positioning can

be defined as a more dynamic form of a social role (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). It is the mechanism through which roles are accepted or denied (Davies & Harré, 1990). In any given social context, numerous potential positions exist (McVee, 2011, p. 5). Various modes of positioning were identified by Harré and van Langenhove, for example, performative and accountable positioning, moral and personal positioning, self and other positioning, tacit and intentional positioning (van Langenhove & Harre, 1999, p. 20). Social positions describe the social status of practice and are communicated to others through interaction, different symbols, choices and values (Bourdieu, 2003). Symbolic or actual positions, such as positions of power, for instance, can appear in any field (Bourdieu, 2003). According to position exchange theory, different positions can emerge in different social circumstances and relations (Martin & Gillespie, 2013).

Bourdieu's concept of 'reflexive sociology' offers youth workers and adult educators a framework to understand and challenge the power relations within their practice. By engaging in self-critical reflection, they can use their insights to reshape their professional roles and drive meaningful change in their fields (Navarro, 2006). This reflexive approach ultimately enables them to act as more conscious and empowered agents of transformation. It had to be noted, that according to Bourdieu the education system itself can be viewed rather autonomic and in the position of reproducing itself (Swarts, 1997) and therefore in a more dominant position than non-formal education, so driving the changes is not easy.

Formal education may be perceived as more prestigious and valued than non-formal education. This hierarchical distinction reflects broader historical and societal attitudes together with institutional structures that privilege traditional forms of education and credentialing (Johnson & Majewska, 2022; Mehbood et al., 2006). When examining this phenomenon through the lens of social positioning and field theory several key insights emerge.

Bourdieu (1990) writes about internalized dispositions: values and behaviors that individuals acquire through socialization within specific social fields. Traditional formal education is viewed as one of the main (compulsory) places of socialization which one way or another becomes dominant and ingrained in the ways of our being. This can predispose to viewing non-formal education as less prestigious due to established norms and practices of formal schooling. Bourdieu emphasizes how individuals occupy different positions within social hierarchies based on different factors such as education and capital (1990).

In the educational field, formal education institutions wield significant symbolic capital, conferring status and recognition on individuals who possess academic credentials and qualifications. Conversely, youth workers and

adult educators, who may either lack formal educational credentials or hold non-traditional qualifications, occupy lower social positions within the educational field and may face a lack of recognition and understanding (Cooper, 2018; Corney et al., 2019; Rannala et al., 2024), for example, lower salaries, lack of benefits or perceptions of the constant need to prove the work to the funders (Kivistik et al., 2023). The flexibility inherent in non-formal learning, which operates without the constraints of formal curricula or standardised assessments, can be seen as both an advantage and a potential vulnerability. On the one hand, this flexibility allows for a more adaptable and learner-centred approach, enabling the learning process to be tailored to individual needs and interests. On the other hand, the lack of formal evaluation for example can be seen as a quality risk from the perspective of formal education practitioners (Coussee, 2016; Kivistik et al., 2023). Explanation and communication of the practice becomes a bigger challenge (Spence, 2007), but understanding own position on the field.

4 Methodology

We based our research on the social constructionism approach (Gergen, 2009). We examined how the adult and youth educators shaped and reshaped social positions in their everyday practice during the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic followed by the war in Ukraine and the overall mental health crisis in connection to both. We discuss the data collected using semi-structured interviews and focus groups through two research projects (Table 4.1). The first research project "Meanings of non-formal learning from the perspectives of practice and practitioners" (2019–2022) was carried out in two stages and was partially funded by Tallinn University (Karu et al., 2019). We as authors have been involved both in the first and the follow-up stage (Jõgi, Rannala & Jüristo, 2024). The second research project "Digital leap in the youth sector" (2023) was carried out under the program "Smart solutions in youth work" funded by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism. Data used in this chapter was collected by I.-E. Rannala.

During the first project, empirical data from the five focus group interviews with 20 participants were collected. During the follow up stage of this research project, six in-depth interviews were conducted. In the second research project, three focus group interviews with 12 participants were conducted.

For data collection, the purposeful sampling method was used in both studies to identify potential participants and form the sample groups, including adult educators, youth workers, and directors or managers of local youth work

TABLE 4.1 Data collection and analysis: Sampling

Research project	Data collection	Methods of collection	Data used for this chapter	Sampling principles	Methods of data analysis
Research 1: Meanings of non-formal learning from the perspectives of practice and practitioners	2019–2020	Semi-structured focus group interviews	5 FGI: 3 with adult educators and 2 with youth workers (20 participants altogether), 107 pages of transcribed text	Purposeful	Thematic analysis informed by Braun and Clarke (2012)
Research 1 follow-up: The social positions of educators and what are the changes in the positions during the COVID-19 crisis	2021–2022	Semi-structured in-depth individual interviews	6 interviews: 3 with adult educators and 3 with youth workers, 79 pages of transcribed text	Purposeful	Thematic analysis informed by Braun and Clarke (2012); Portrait method informed by Goodson (2013)

and youth centres. Participation was voluntary at all stages. In Project 1's initial phase, participants from various adult and youth education institutions with experience in facilitating non-formal learning were sought out. Subsequently, for the follow-up stage, criteria for participation included having worked during the COVID-19 pandemic and possessing a minimum of two years of prior professional experience to enable a comparative analysis of their practice before and after the pandemic. The selected sample group comprised six educators, anonymised under the pseudonyms: of one male, *Andreas*, and five females: *Maria, Helen, Eva, Madel, and Anne.* Their professional backgrounds were rooted in youth work and non-formal adult education, with professional experience ranging from three to 20 years.

For the second research project, the selected purposeful sample group consisted of 12 municipal youth work managers who were keen to discuss digital and other changes in youth work practices, particularly in light of the experiences brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine and the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in Estonia.

The Code of Ethics of Estonian Scientists (2002) and the Estonian Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2017) were strictly followed by researchers at all stages. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research

and their participation was voluntary. Informed written consent was given and participants were reminded that they could stop the interview or the recording whenever needed, and that they were free to step out of the research after the interview. All interviews were anonymised and in the individual interviews, pseudonyms were given.

4.1 *Data Analysis*

The empirical analysis presented below concentrated mainly on data collected from adult educators and youth workers. The analysis aimed to explore and understand participants' experiences of their social positions. Thematic analysis, following the six analytical steps for empirical data analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012), was employed. These steps included: (1) familiarizing with the collected data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report. Thematic analysis was systematically applied in both Research One and Research Two (see Table 4.1). The analysis process began with a thorough reading of the entire empirical dataset, starting with the data from the first research project, followed by the data from the second. Meaningful segments were highlighted and coded, and these codes were then grouped into broader themes. In the final stage, vivid empirical data extracts were selected as empirical illustrations to illustrate key findings. The final step of the analysis involved selecting vivid data extracts from empirical data, linking them to the themes. Additionally, the portrayal method was used in the second, follow up stage of the first research project for the analysis of the six in-depth individual interviews and for processing analysed data into individual findings (Goodson, 2013). This method involves constructing narrative portrayals as representations of individuals' experiences that capture both personal stories and professional contexts. The purpose of using the portrayal method was to rich to the more holistic view of each educator's professional background and their practice. Using the portrayal method enabled us to present analysed data into meaningful and individualized findings, emphasizing the professional context and understand the background of the professional practice of the educators (Jõgi, Rannala & Jüristo, 2024).

At all stages of the data analysis, we discussed the findings together as researchers to create an accurate and reliable analysis process (Morse, 2018).

Empirical examples from the data collected using focus group interviews are identified and presented here as adult educators with the number in the group (e.g., AE1), or youth workers with the number in the group (e.g., YE1). Examples from the empirical data from the second project (focus groups with municipal youth work managers) are identified as M1, M2, and M3. For the six individual interviews pseudonyms mentioned above are used.

5 Findings and Discussion

After overcoming the COVID-19 crisis, we were confronted with a new challenge, the war in Ukraine, which began in 2022. For Estonia, this brought about not only fear, as we share a border with the aggressor, but also over 44,000 refugees staying (Statistics Estonia, 2024). Such a refugee crisis, and the subsequent need for adaptation in the educational sector had not been experienced for decades. Additionally, it has been highlighted that a mental health crisis has followed the other crisis (Eesti rahvastiku vaimse terviseuuring, 2022).

Below, we present and discuss the findings and look at the changes in the practice during the crisis through the lens of the social positions of practitioners and their managers. The analysis revealed a convergence in the perspectives of educators and managers as well as practicing before and during the crisis. Four distinct social positions of educators and youth workers emerged from the findings in the first stage of the research before the crisis, *Noticer and Creator*, *Partner, Supporter of Development, and Confident Questioner*, each described by values, beliefs, methods, activities and behaviors important in practice. Four interconnected social positions highlight different dimensions of how adult educators and youth workers navigate their roles and relationships with learners and what are their main values. These positions illustrate

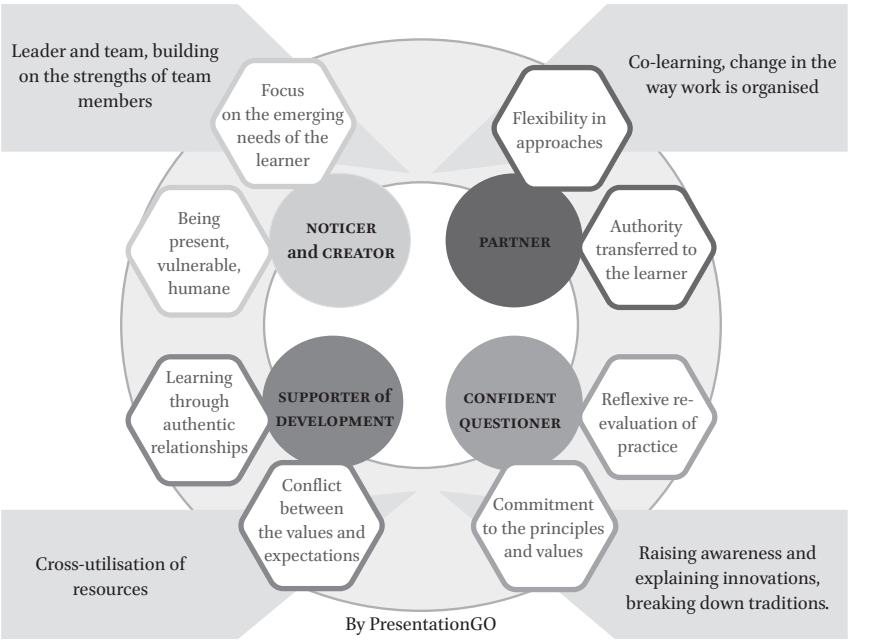

FIGURE 4.1 Social positions of educators and four cornerstones of managerial support

a holistic view of how educators and youth workers adapt and grow within their professional landscapes, balancing personal ideals with the demands of the broader social context (Figure 4.1). Our further research (Table 4.1: research 1 follow-up and research 2) demonstrated how the social positions of adult educators and youth workers during the crisis crystallized and became stronger. Building and leading the teams, co-learning, cross-utilizations of the resources, raising awareness and supporting the innovations are four cornerstones of foundational managerial support (Figure 4.1).

Below we present the key values, beliefs, and behaviors associated with each social position. We will look at how those social positions strengthened during the crisis. Additionally, we will incorporate the perspectives of managers, exploring how they observed changes in the practice during the crisis time together with the managerial support provided.

5.1 *Social Positions*

Four interconnected social positions were as already mentioned: *Noticer and Creator*, *Partner, Supporter of Development and Confident Questioner*.

Noticer and Creator—adult educators and youth workers recognize the emotional and psychological needs of their learners. In this position, the main value is the deep connection between educators and learners, on building trust and addressing the learners' dreams, fears, and hopes. For some educators, non-formal learning is a therapeutic space, especially for individuals who had negative prior experiences with education.

> I have adults in my group who show no interest in learning because they have had badexperiences in school and their memories are so bad that they don't want to learn and in this kind of case non-formal learning becomes therapeutic in a way it will take time though to overcome fears and start learning again. (AE3)

One could say that the social position of the *Noticer and Creator* is embracing human-centred learning while being flexible and supportive, allowing learners the space to grow. Their approach was characterized by attentiveness, creating a safe learning environment keeping in mind the needs of learners, and fostering meaningful learning experiences.

> We start from … what that young person comes with and what they need. And it's our job to get it … Whether it's at the card table or just by talking to the young person and noticing them, and then creating the opportunities to follow up on that young person's problem, their interest, whatever. (YE1)

Closely connected to the *Noticer and Creator* is the position of the *Partner*. Here, adult educators and youth workers see themselves more as equals than teachers, engaging in dialogue with their learners. This position is built on openness and collaboration, reflecting a mutual learning process where educators and learners co-create knowledge.

> Non-formal learning for me is a dialogue. It's not a lecture, where only I talk, but I also listen and want to know how people react. (AE3)

Educators value interactive and cooperative learning where responsibility is shared with learners.

> In the youth centre / … / we know that whenever we do an activity or an event when it has its purpose, and what invites young people, that young people themselves want to do it. For me, this is an important part and it is also, so to speak, this part of non-formal learning, that young people themselves want it, but at the same time, they have to see it as a learning or learning outcome, that what they learn from this activity. (YE2)

This collaborative and partnering approach fosters a sense of ownership in learners, encouraging active participation and personal responsibility in the learning process. Educators and youth workers foster environments where dialogue and involvement are central, creating space for learners to take initiative.

While youth workers and educators embraced human-centred and dialogical approaches, the realities of societal expectations and policy requirements were described by the *Supporter of Development* position. This position reflects the tensions between the values of non-formal learning and the practical demands placed on educators by external systems and policies.

> It's not going well for me—I teach in non-formal learning, but when, for example, I have the course on entrepreneurship, it is usually filled with people sent by the Unemployment Insurance Fund and when there is a curriculum and an ambitious goal that at the end of the course they all have a good business plan. So, how am I supposed to use non-formal learning principles? I have to pay attention to the people and their needs and background. So, we struggle there together, which is definitely a characteristic of non-formal learning. However, the groups of learners are very stimulating and they support each other in their development. (AE2)

Despite these challenges, educators and youth workers remain committed to fostering development in their learners, balancing the demands of policy with

their professional values. However, this balancing act often leads to critical reflections on the limitations imposed by external frameworks, as educators navigate between their ideals and the practicalities of their work. Therefore, finally, the *Confident Questioner* position embodies educators' reflections on their professional identity and growth. Educators and youth workers here focus on self-trust and self-care, viewing their role as facilitators of learning. This position involves a critical engagement with one's professional practice, where educators question their methods and strive for personal and collective growth within the field.

> When we talk about a self-directed learner, the ultimate goal is to have self-directed employees in the workforce. It feels like everything is moving faster and faster, and it seems unrealistic to expect that someone at work will be thinking about whether you're managing to keep up—you probably have to figure that out on your own. Plus, we're expected to pick up new skills more quickly all the time. So, it's important to understand what kind of learner you are and to have a 'toolbox' of different learning methods that work best for you. You need to know how you learn things best and at what pace, and also have a clear sense of what's realistic and what's not. (YE2)

This position highlights the importance of self-reflection and professional growth, and educators taking responsibility for professionalism while also acknowledging the uncertainties they face.

5.2 *Crisis: Strengthening Social Positions*

When the COVID-19 crisis hit, followed by the war in Ukraine, these social positions did not disappear, but rather crystallized and evolved, as educators and youth workers were forced to adapt to unprecedented challenges. The crises acted as a catalyst for solidifying these roles, with certain positions becoming more dominant depending on the context.

As described earlier, the position of *Noticer and Creator* is centered on identifying learners' emotional and developmental needs and responding with creativity and empathy. During the pandemic, this role became more evident as educators shifted focus toward fostering a sense of safety, connection, and emotional support.

> There were moments, especially with first and second graders, where we had 45-minute meetings, and I just stayed quiet while they talked among themselves … about their toys, birthdays, and simple, everyday topics. (Maria)

Educators emphasized the importance of creating a supportive atmosphere during a time of heightened uncertainty and the readiness to reorientate their practices toward emotional presence and collaboration.

> Because during that period, the training activities were meant for the teachers who were working there, in that uncertainty. And who all had their own personal well-being and family security and so on in the background anyway. … Yeah, so I was probably paying more attention to creating that safe mood and maybe enabling that togetherness. (Anne)

The approach underscores the core principle of noticing and facilitating space for learners to express themselves, aligning with earlier findings where educators emphasized creating environments of trust and excitement for individual growth.

These examples underscore how educators prioritized emotional presence, allowing learners' needs to shape practice, and illustrating the heightened importance of being attuned to the human aspects of education during the pandemic.

The position of *Partner*, which prioritizes dialogue, collaboration, and flexibility, was strengthened as educators adapted to virtual and hybrid formats. The crisis catalyzed a shift in decision-making power, enabling learners to take ownership of their educational experiences.

> We took it very seriously. We understood that we had to do our job. We needed to find a way to communicate with young people, to figure out what that way would be. And it was our youngsters, the ones we wanted to connect with, who suggested it (the Discord online platform). And it happened in a very collaborative way—how the platform was created and how it was adapted over time. For example, the young people who helped set up the server were given specific roles. One was, for instance, an 'IT person', and there was all this structure in place. (Eva)

This approach reflects the notion of educators as facilitators rather than authoritative figures, empowering learners to take responsibility and become co-creators of their learning environments. It aligns with the foundational practice of involving learners as active participants.

Flexibility emerged as a crucial component, allowing educators to adapt while maintaining core values—an essential quality in times of crisis.

> Well, let's put it this way: just as I conduct highly interactive training sessions in person, my online trainings are also very interactive. In a sense, I

> tested this out. It was really interesting—with this one training, or rather, with one particular topic model, let's say. Something I had primarily done in a physical space before. I transferred it almost one-to-one into an online format, in terms of structure, you know. I simply found solutions, right? / … / For every tool I had used in face-to-face training, I found an equivalent online tool to do the same thing. So, broadly speaking, I transferred the same structure into the online environment, you know. (Madel)

The collaboration between educators and learners strengthened relationships and fostered adaptability, ensuring that learning continued despite the challenges.

In the position of *Supporter of Development*, educators had to navigate the tensions between their values and societal expectations while fostering growth and overcoming challenges during the crisis.

> In some ways, you could say I became more lenient, whereas I'm usually rather precise. Finding that balance—acknowledging that we need to learn something, but at the same time allowing ourselves just to be—became key. Still, the emphasis was more on the need to learn something, the obligation that you must develop. Young people have to develop. And this sense of correctness and all of that—I became more lenient in this respect. (Maria)

This reflects earlier findings where educators recognized the weight of societal expectations, but prioritized aligning their practices with the principles of nonformal learning. The crisis intensified these tensions, compelling educators to recalibrate their approaches while keeping the focus on learner development.

The recognition of vulnerability as a form of leadership also signifies a shift toward authentic relationships, reinforcing the position's emphasis on relational learning and leading by example.

> It's always been that I've seen myself as a role model for others., but if I fail now, am I still a role model? I got over it, though. You're much more of a role model when you're a person. In the sense that you're a role model as a human being. Because everyone fails. Every young person, every elderly person—everyone. (Helen)

This reaffirms the initial analysis, highlighting the importance of human-centered, real-world practices in navigating institutional pressures during times of crisis.

The position of *Confident Questioner,* characterized by critical reflection and adherence to professional values, was sharpened during the crisis. Educators found themselves in situations that required them to question and reaffirm their principles and roles.

> There was a bit of an identity crisis, too, thinking back at the first lockdown. That youth workers were deployed, or attempted to be deployed, very much in these control patrols. So that caused quite a lot of discussion about whether we are not doing the opposite of what we should be doing. It was often done together with the police, breaking up groups of young people, lecturing, and admonishing them. Depending on who you were paired with, it could also be very stern and unpleasant. So, there was relatively little opportunity to do actual youth work there. (Andreas)

This reluctance highlights the position's role in safeguarding the integrity of practice, reflecting earlier discussions on educators' professional identities and their commitment to values over external demands.

The reflective nature of this position became critical as educators grappled with their well-being while remaining committed to their learners.

> And for myself, finding balance was very difficult. On one hand, I had to take care of my mental health, and on the other hand, I had to be there for the young people. Where do I draw the line between when I stop worrying about the youth and start worrying about myself. (Maria)

The crisis solidified educators' dedication to their professional roles while encouraging a deeper evaluation of their practices. The COVID-19 crisis, coupled with its societal and personal disruptions, brought the social positions of educators into sharper focus. Positions not only persisted, but were redefined and reinforced in response to the challenges of the time. The crisis intensified the core practices and values associated with social positions while revealing new dynamics of professional identity. Adult and youth educators see their practice as a value-driven practice—this has become even more crystallized during the pandemic.

5.3 *Changes in Practice and Managerial Support during the Crisis*

The findings reveal how the social positions of educators and youth workers evolved during the crises. The crisis forced rapid adjustments in how educators and youth workers approached their practice. Managerial views aligned with and supported the social positions of educators and youth workers. In these

views, there was *noticing and building* the team, *co-learning* and partnership, supporting developments through *cross-utilization of resources* and *raising awareness* of the changes in practice together with *explaining innovations.* We have named those themes together as four cornerstones of support (Figure 4.1).

In the same manner as in the practice, itself noticing the needs and strengths of the team members became important for the managers. Building on the strengths was important together with creating new approaches for the practice during the crisis. Flexibility, creativity, and courage became paramount as practitioners navigated the challenges.

> I think we experienced a significant leap in development when COVID hit. At that moment, I believe we were supported by the fact that we were able to move forward together, and I saw that everyone was innovative and ready to try out new things. We leaned on each others' strengths because it's neither practical nor necessary to suddenly learn 20 new platforms or become a video editor overnight. It's better to see what our strengths are and what we can accomplish with them. (M2)

What happened while adjusting the practice? Educators were compelled to step outside their comfort zones, embracing experimentation and adaptation in response to rapidly changing circumstances. This necessitated swift transitions to online platforms, the exploration of new technological tools, and a willingness to learn from failures. Collaboration with learners became central to decision-making processes, fostering a sense of shared ownership and empowerment and building trust.

> First and foremost, it's important to establish contact and build a trusting relationship, rather than jumping straight into speaking a foreign language (with Ukrainian refugees), for example, as that can undermine trust. Youth workers have to be sensitive with such matters and carefully consider which priorities to take (M2)./ Those same values and approaches were used by the managers amongst teams. /What has really worked for us is learning from each other. We've had development days, even closed the centers for this and focused on aligning our services for the future. Working together through discussions and shared learning has been very effective. (M1)

As a result of co-learning and collaboration, practice became more inclusive and responsive to the evolving needs of the learners and also community. Traditional methods were reassessed, and in some cases, replaced by more innovative and effective approaches. Youth workers also became more visible

within their communities, actively participating in initiatives like street outreach or community-building projects. From the viewpoint of managers, it was important to support developments and changes on organisational level and they saw their role in it.

> If we want to see ourselves as a learning and growing organization, it'd be pretty sad if we were still thinking the same way today as we did five years ago. That would be awful, and it would mean the organization has no ability to learn or develop. A leader really needs to pay attention to this overall mindset. (M3)

While the crisis periods highlighted the adaptability and resilience of the practice, managers were quick to point out that such progress cannot be sustained without consistent investment. Managers noted that resources, both financial and human, are essential to maintaining the level of innovation and responsiveness that was achieved during the crisis.

> In youth work, consistent investments are essential. Just like in any other learning environment, we need to understand that resources wear out in three to five years and obviously need to be refreshed to stay up-to-date and appealing. So, to keep things running at a high level and to keep improving and developing, you have to consistently plan for the necessary resources. (M2)

Without such investment, the progress made during the crisis would be difficult to sustain in the long term.

The ability to adapt and innovate in response to unprecedented challenges was facilitated by strong managerial support, effective teamwork, and a shared commitment to learning. Managers played a pivotal role in guiding their teams through these transformations, fostering environments where creativity, flexibility, and mutual support could flourish. However, sustaining these developments will require ongoing investment and a continued focus on organizational growth.

6 Conclusions

We have discussed how the professional practice of adult educators and youth workers evolved in response to the dual crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine followed by the mental health crisis. These crises acted

as catalysts for the crystallization and strengthening of four social positions: *Noticer and Creator*, *Partner*, *Supporter of Development*, and *Confident Questioner*. These positions, which had emerged before the crises, were reaffirmed and adapted to meet the unprecedented challenges faced by educators and learners alike.

Each social position embodies specific values, beliefs, and behaviors essential for the practice. The position of *Noticer and Creato*r became particularly significant as practitioners focused on the emotional well-being of learners, fostering safe spaces for growth and human connection. The position of *Partner* highlighted the importance of collaboration and mutual learning, especially as educators shifted to virtual and hybrid formats, further empowering learners as co-creators and owners of their learning experiences. The position of *Supporter of Development* reflected the tensions between educators' ideals and policy expectations, where they continued to prioritize learner development despite institutional pressures. Finally, the position of *Confident Questioner* illustrated how educators engaged in critical reflection, navigating their professional identities while balancing their well-being with the needs of their learners.

Managerial support was critical in enabling educators to adapt and thrive during these crises. This alignment between educators' social positions and managerial support underscored the importance of flexibility, creativity, collaboration and the need for sustained investments in resources to innovate and adapt the practice during challenging times.

The multiple crises have caused challenges and have had a big impact on the field of youth and adult education and the professional work of educators. According to the latest research educators experienced issues in mental health, disorientation, frustration, confusion, little support, being overworked, increasing stress and working in isolation (Green et al., 2021; Hansman, 2022; Wlodarsky & Hansman, 2022; Shmidt et al., 2022). Scholars have also reported positive impacts: learning new skills, developing new teaching practices and new types of communication with learners; being able to safely teach on, line, the need for deep learning and reflection and the need for supporting adult learners in an ethic of care (Hansman, 2022; Schmidt et al., 2022).

Several factors are crucial in crisis time: ongoing professionalisation, collaboration and cross-sectoral cooperation (Green et al., 2021). In the context of COVID-19, the lack of collective culpability for the sustainability of education is causing educational systems to collapse. Adaptability and shared educational responsibility for collaborative solutions to common problems in crises time as the main components of the *Framework for adaptability* are the possibilities for coping with challenges in the field of education (Green et al., 2021, p. 861).

As Green with colleagues stated, adaptability is based on democratic values of dialogue, diversity, and open communication. "The framework of adaptability sees the plurality of human experience and meets learners where they are, as people who are at once persistent and changing, vulnerable and resilient" (Green et al., 2021, p. 872). The key components of educational adaptability are cooperation, inclusion, and flexibility within and between stakeholders at the individual, community, state, and global levels. On the individual level promoting care and support, developing dialogue, meaningful interactions, relationships based on trust and networking ensuring adult learners feel valued and fully integrated in the learning process (Green et al., 2021, p. 862). Based on the theoretical framework outlined in this chapter and the findings of our research, it can be concluded that while there are indicators of agency, there are also inherent risks associated with the crystallized social positions of adult educators and youth workers. The research highlights a strong adherence to values that are well understood, communicated, and practiced during times of crisis. However, tension emerges within one particular position due to policy expectations and potential contradictions between these expectations and the core values of practice. Our findings suggest that acting as agents for these practice values and elevating the status of adult education and youth work within the broader educational field is not achievable without strong and systematic managerial support and investments. There is a concern that practices with lower status and lesser resources within the educational field may be marginalized or exploited during crises, although they hold great potential in meeting the needs of the learners during the crisis and flexibility in adjusting to the changes.

In conclusion, the social positions of adult educators and youth workers show a dynamic and interplay between individual agency and the broader structural demands of the educational field. The tension between non-formal learning values and external policy demands was evident, but needs further research.

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CHAPTER 5

Resilience at Work

Adult Educators Navigating the COVID-19 Crisis

Anna Anastasopoulou and Maria Santa

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic forced adult educators worldwide to shift from face-to-face to online teaching quickly. Grounded in systems theory, social ecology, and a critical realist perspective on resilience, this study explores how adult educators in Greece navigated this crisis and offers broader insights into resilience in education systems during crises. Through in-depth interviews, the research examines how educators mobilized existing resources and sought new ones to reconstruct normalcy in their disrupted school and classroom micro-systems. Findings show that macro-system conditions, such as precarious employment and limited digital infrastructure, shaped educators' adaptability. Collaborative efforts within professional micro-systems and using exo-system resources, such as social media networks, fostered resilience. Transformative approaches, like creative and workshop-based teaching, led to more sustainable practices than attempts to replicate pre-COVID-19 classroom norms. This study underscores the need to rethink resilience as a dynamic, interconnected process, offering insights that can inform policy responses to bolster resilience in adult education settings during future crises.

Keywords

resilience – systems theory – adult educators – emergency remote teaching – COVID-19 crisis

1 Introduction

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments suspended face-to-face education, leading to "emergency remote teaching" (ERT), a shift to fully online teaching in crisis conditions (Hodges et al., 2020). ERT often lacked

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pre-planned resources and infrastructure, making resilience crucial for overcoming adversity and reconstructing meaningful teaching practices.

Resilience has been conceptualized and defined across a diverse array of academic disciplines. Within a psychological framework, psychological resilience has been defined as "the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands" (American Psychological Association, 2018, para. 1). Norris et al. (2008) describe resilience as a process linking adaptive capacities to positive outcomes after a disturbance. From an ecological perspective, resilience refers to a system's ability to absorb change and disturbance (Holling, 1973), while social ecology emphasizes individuals' capacity to access resources for well-being (Ungar, 2011). Masten (2016) defines resilience as the capacity for successful adaptation to disturbances that threaten a system's functions.

Based on a systemic perspective, this study presents a qualitative investigation of adult educators' resilience during Greece's transition to ERT, exploring their responses to adversities they experienced and the meanings they attached to them.

1.1 *Adult Educators' Resilience from a Systemic Perspective*

The actions undertaken by professionals in response to crisis circumstances and the capacities and resources that were utilized to perform these actions are shaped by the interaction of forces operating at multiple levels. At the intrapersonal level, factors such as personal traits, professional background, professional identity, professional experience, knowledge, skills, dispositions, values, and emotional and social competencies play a critical role in shaping professionals' decisions and commitment to the timing, efficiency, and effectiveness of actions taken by professionals with the aim of dealing with a crisis situation (Adamson et al., 2014; Day, 2018; Flores, 2018; Kearns & McArdle, 2012; Tomassini, 2015). Resilience encompasses a wide spectrum of resources and processes that may be *mobilized in time* to respond to adverse circumstances. Such resources and processes are distributed across complex interacting systems.

Focusing on adult educators, their capacity for resilience can be empowered by contextual factors in the micro-systems of their everyday lives. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), a micro-system is defined as "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (p. 22). The micro-systems of individuals may vary considerably. From a rather generic perspective, the micro-systems of adult educators may encompass:

1. their workplace (their daily work and interactions, education school resources and curricula, organizational culture and leadership in the workplace) (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; Gu & Day, 2013; Le Cornu, 2013; Peters & Pearce, 2012), and
2. their family and close friends, as well as other people with whom adult educators interact regularly in their local community and other public contexts (e.g., social media, professional associations, sports clubs, etc.).

These micro-systems may also include a variety of techno-subsystems (Johnson, 2010; Johnson & Puplampu, 2008) which can offer further resources for resilience capacity building in the transition to ERT, involving the regular use of technologies such as smartphones, search engines, digital content, etc.

Micro-systems in their physical and virtual manifestations interact with each other in complex ways. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), these interactions constitute the meso-system, a system of micro-systems of a person's everyday life. Within such a meso-system, capacities that exist in one micro-system of an adult educator's life can be mobilized to complement capacities for resilience needed to ERT in their school-based micro-system.

The next higher systems level of analysis is *exo-systems* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Exo-systems involve settings where an adult educator does not have any kind of direct involvement. However, things that happen in these settings may have direct or indirect consequences at the micro- and meso-system level of adult educators' everyday lives. What can be considered "settings" or "events" in exo-systems in the study of adult educators' resilience in the face of adversity may vary considerably. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and the transition to ERT, one of the most critical exo-systems was the government center(s) with emergency powers to design and implement rapid responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, which included the decision to close down all schools and to restrict movement in all public spaces.

The (dominant) ideologies and the discourses on adult education, its societal value and purpose (Barros, 2012; Mikulec, 2018), the structure, the legislative framework and regulations and governance of adult education, public infrastructures and public funding on adult education, qualifications frameworks, and adult educators' professionalization (Andersson et al., 2013; Doyle et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2021; Gedvilienė et al., 2018; Ioannou, 2023; Piliri & Gravani, 2023), as well as status and working conditions (Breshears, 2019; O'Neill & Fitzsimons, 2020; Sun, 2010; Werner & Martin, 2023) are manifestations of the *macro-system* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), in which adult educators work, pursue their careers, and develop professionally. This macro-system directly or indirectly shapes the preparedness of the adult education system in general, and the capacity of adult educators in particular to respond effectively to crises.

In summary, adult educators' resilience during the transition to emergency remote teaching (ERT) can be understood as a dynamic interplay between the multiple systems in which they operate—micro-systems, meso-systems, exo-systems, and macro-systems. The cascading disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated shifts not only within these systems, but alsoin the relationships between them.

Drawing on Buzzanell's resilience framework (Betts et al., 2022; Buzzanell, 2010, 2018), this study explores adult educators' stories and perspectives on their struggles to reimagine and create new normalcies in their daily work. We are focusing on the following research questions: How do these new normalcies manifest in their experiences? What changed—or remained unchanged—in their interactions with students, colleagues, and others within their micro- and meso-systems? How were their sense of agency and professional identity affected, and how did these changes shape their actions in constructing new normalcies? What were the perceived consequences of their efforts?

The study also examines how resilience was framed in the unfolding of events within the context of disrupted professional and personal lives. The overarching research interest is to explore the logic underlying adult educators' stories of newly imagined and constructed normalcies. Specifically, from a social resilience perspective, we aim to compare adaptation logic with more creative and transformative approaches (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). We are particularly interested in how some educators sought to reconstruct pre-COVID-19 face-to-face teaching norms within the online environment, while others embraced the disruption as an opportunity for creativity, leading to qualitatively novel processes and outcomes.

To frame these processes conceptually, this study draws on a synthesis of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and Buzzanell's communication theory of resilience. Bronfenbrenner's model offers a multi-layered lens for examining how interactions across micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systems shape adult educators' adaptive capacities during times of systemic disruption. Buzzanell's framework emphasizes the communicative practices through which individuals construct resilience—by sharing stories, negotiating meaning, and imagining "new normalcies" in the face of uncertainty. Together, these perspectives support an understanding of resilience as a socially situated and dynamically enacted process, embedded within the interplay of personal agency and contextual forces.

In Greece, the first nationwide lockdown began on 10 March 2020, leading to the abrupt closure of all educational institutions. As a response to the crisis, the government introduced centrally managed tools for synchronous teaching, and issued instructions to set up course content on CMS platforms. However, for most educators, this marked their first real engagement with online

delivery. The transition occurred in a context where teaching had traditionally been conducted exclusively in physical classrooms. The pandemic disrupted not only educators' professional routines, but also the broader micro-systems of daily life, as entire households were suddenly confined to home, navigating work, study, and care giving simultaneously.

By exploring Greek adult educators' stories and perspectives, we aim to shed light on the mechanisms of resilience, the adaptations and transformations that emerged, and the broader implications for adult education during crises. This exploration not only contributes to understanding the immediate impact of the pandemic on adult educators' lives and work, but also provides insights into how resilience frameworks can inform future strategies for supporting adult educators in times of systemic disruption.

2 Methodology

The empirical study was based on qualitative research design, drawing upon a critical realism perspective to explore the interface between subjective experiences with objective reality. This approach helps to explore the relationship between the agency of adult educators and the societal dynamics that emerged during this dramatic transition from normality to ERT. Bhaskar's (2008) critical realism provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the deeper structures and mechanisms that underpin observed events. It reveals how structural forces or mechanisms shape our lives and produce visible outcomes (Archer et al., 2013; Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018).

2.1 *Research Participants*

Eight adult educators with no prior professional experience as online teachers participated in the study (Table 5.1).

Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants. Given the unprecedented nature of ERT, this approach was more feasible for targeting participants with relevant experiences who felt comfortable sharing their perspectives on this stressful period. They all lived in households with three or four other people (seven participants with their spouses and kids; one participant with parents and siblings).

The participants were teaching in secondary and post-secondary technical/vocational programs for adults in schools located in six Greek cities. Their courses included typical classroom-based, "theoretical" and laboratory-workshop lessons.

TABLE 5.1 Participants' socio-demographic data

Name*	Specialty	Gender	Age	Years of experience as adult educator
Mary	Museology teacher	Female	47	3
Helen	German language teacher	Female	40	16
Nick	Culinary Arts teacher	Male	42	14
John	Economics teacher	Male	29	1
Peter	Computer teacher	Male	42	6
Margaret	Teacher for nursery assistants	Female	50	6
Angela	Cosmetology teacher	Female	42	17
Anna	English language teacher/ Deputy headteacher	Female	47	7

* To protect participants' anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned randomly from a pre-prepared list of common names, ensuring that they bore no relation to the participants' actual identities.

Teaching in non-formal adult education and training in Greece is, for many adult educators, a part-time job. According to the latest data obtained by the National Statistical Authority ELSTAT, over 99% of the teaching staff in public institutes of post-secondary vocational training is employed on a fixed-term part-time contract (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2018). In Second Chance Schools, around 74% of the teaching staff works on a fixed-term contract and is paid by hours of teaching (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2024, Table 10). Among the eight interviewees in this study, only one was working as full-time permanent teaching staff in a public vocational evening school. Another one was also working in a public vocational evening school on a fixed-term contract (the school year). The rest six were paid by their hours of actual teaching in non-formal (post-secondary) vocational training programs for adults. Among the eight interviewees, four said that they were doing another job in parallel.

2.2 *Data Collection*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via video calls between June and December 2021, each lasting 30–45 minutes. Data collection and the recording of the interviews were done in full compliance with the EU's General Data

Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Regulation 2016/679, 2016) on the protection of persons with regard to the processing of personal data and the free movement of such data. All research participants signed a consent form in which, after being informed in detail about the research and the procedures to be followed, they explicitly gave their consent to use their interview responses for the purposes of this study.

Participants were asked to reflect on their emergency remote teaching experiences during the lockdown, focusing on those they found particularly significant.

Interview questions explored:

1. The arrangements they set up at home to prepare for and deliver online classes.
2. The role of their prior education and skills in relation to their ability to adapt to the demands of ERT.
3. Changes they made to their teaching practices compared to typical face-to-face lessons.
4. How these new arrangements affected their personal and family lives.
5. The effects of working from home on their relationships with colleagues.
6. The role of support from school leaders, peers, and professional networks in overcoming challenges.
7. Their views on the preparedness and effectiveness of government policies and infrastructure implemented during the crisis.

During the interviews, prompts were used to encourage elaboration, specific examples, and personal stories, allowing participants to share alternative perspectives and provide deeper insights.

2.3 *Data Analysis*

The analysis of the transcribed interview data was guided by a critical realism perspective (Smith & Elger, 2012), seeking to uncover the layered realities of micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systems in participants' lives. While our data analysis approach shares interpretive approaches' emphasis on meaning-making and subjective understanding, it also aims to identify underlying structures and mechanisms shaping participants' experiences and narratives.

The process began with an in-depth familiarization with the data. Transcripts were read multiple times and initial notes captured key phrases, recurring themes, and significant experiences. Coding followed to systematically identify meaningful units of text. Descriptive codes were developed and grouped into broader thematic categories, such as "challenges during ERT", "impact on personal life", and "support mechanisms". These themes were then analyzed through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems framework.

Micro-system themes related to participants' immediate environments, such as their classrooms, schools, and family dynamics, were analyzed to identify how these micro-systems were affected during the lockdown and in what ways they may have supported or hindered educators' resilience. Meso-systems, representing interactions between micro-systems (e.g., work-life balance), were examined for their role in shaping adaptation. Exo-systems resources were analyzed for their contributions to resilience. Macro-systems, encompassing broader factors like employment conditions and governance of adult education as well as public infrastructures were also considered. Cross-case analysis compared patterns and differences across participants' narratives to identify shared strategies and unique challenges, offering deeper insights into resilience mechanisms.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, regular discussions were held among the researchers to review codes, themes, and interpretations. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the analysis process to minimize biases and acknowledge the researchers' own influence on the interpretation of the data. The final step involved synthesizing the insights gained from the thematic and systems-level analysis into coherent narratives that highlighted the key findings of the study. These narratives were supported by illustrative quotes from participants to ensure that their voices were authentically represented.

3 Findings

3.1 *Macro-system Conditions: Problematizing Resilience in the Context of Precarity*

Adult educators' professional resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic must be understood within the macro-system of adult education in Greece, characterized by precarious employment conditions. Many adult educators work part-time on fixed-term contracts, paid per teaching hour, which undermines job stability and limits professional development opportunities. As Angela, an interviewee, explained:

> We don't know which school(s) will hire us, or which classes we will teach …. We may also need to teach at different types of schools. […] … in parallel, we may be doing a second, completely different job. So, you understand it's very, very difficult.

Such macro-system conditions hinder the formation of stable workplace micro-systems and relationships, as educators often teach in multiple schools, spending only a few hours weekly in each. The sudden shift to emergency

remote teaching (ERT) during the first lockdown added a new layer of uncertainty and challenge to their professional lives.

While interviewees acknowledged the necessity of online teaching during a national lockdown, many described the transition as abrupt and unprepared. Peter, a computer teacher, characterized it as "violent", a sentiment echoed by Anna, an English teacher, who felt "forced to adapt to a new reality without warning".

For others, however, prior experience in online teaching offered a smoother transition. Angela, a cosmetology teacher, hoped online teaching would eventually complement face-to-face learning. Drawing from her experience creating digital content for a university, she adapted confidently to this new reality.

The responses to ERT varied, shaped by personal skills and prior exposure to digital teaching methods. While some educators navigated the transition by leveraging their own resources, others lacked the necessary skills and felt unprepared. In the absence of substantial support from the exo-system, such as central government initiatives, the transition revealed disparities in resilience, rooted in the wider macro-system context of adult education in Greece.

3.2 *Recreating a Supportive Professional and Workplace Micro-system*

The lockdown required adult educators to reconstruct their disrupted school micro-system to navigate the transition to ERT. The need for enhanced communication, collaboration, and solidarity became critical for re-establishing a sense of belonging and collective action. Many educators reported higher levels of collaboration and support among colleagues during the lockdown compared to pre-lockdown times. Angela reflected on this shift, noting:

> We collaborated and talked more than we did at school, where we didn't have much time since the only free time we had was during breaks. Especially in adult education, where you're paid by the hour and you leave the school building as soon as you finish your lessons.

To address these challenges, educators created social media groups to share news, troubleshoot problems, and provide mutual support. The necessity of collaboration strengthened bonds among school colleagues, fostering what Angela described as "tele-education friendships". Margaret, a teacher for nursery assistants, noted that this new solidarity "truthfully kept us going". In addition to school-based networks, many educators sought support through national online communities. A particularly impactful resource was the Facebook group "Distance Education", created shortly after the first lockdown in March 2020. This group rapidly grew to more than 50,000 members, providing

a platform for educators across Greece to exchange advice, online teaching tools, e-learning content, and webinar opportunities. Anna, an English language teacher, described its value:

> An excellent [Facebook] group called *'Distance Education'* was created, which included people with computer skills and patience … We were immensely grateful for this group. Thousands of educators, believe me, felt this way because it was the only common resource we had, the only help we had in this struggle.

Despite this enormous expansion of professional support and solidarity, the explosion of e-learning content and options for skill development on the internet also contributed to information overload. Educators often lacked the time to evaluate or explore all the content that was daily shared by their colleagues all over Greece, and some struggled to assess its relevance or quality. While many webinars and online workshops were helpful, their scheduling—often during afternoons or evenings when educators were teaching online—made them difficult to attend. Angela, a cosmetology teacher, noted: "To attend these programs, they need to be scheduled at times that we are available and can participate".

Despite these difficulties, foreign language teachers among the participants felt better supported, as they could access additional resources from the foreign language publishing industry, which had a longstanding tradition of assisting educators with teaching materials and professional development.

In summary, the transition to ERT fostered a sense of solidarity and collaboration among educators, often surpassing pre-lockdown levels of professional interaction. While informal networks, both school-based and national, played a critical role in rebuilding educators' professional and workplace micro-systems, information overload and logistical barriers limited the full utilization of these resources.

3.3 *Managing to Meet from a Distance*

In face-to-face teaching, the fundamental precondition of a lesson is for students and teachers to meet in a shared physical space at a specific time. However, the transition to online synchronous teaching made the establishment of a new routine a challenging exercise.

Interviewees consistently highlighted in their stories the stress and difficulties associated with this basic precondition: to meet online on time and without technical problems. They reported significant embarrassment and frustration when technical difficulties disrupted their ability to connect with students. Unstable internet connections, malfunctioning equipment such as

microphones or cameras, and teleconference platform crashes were common obstacles. For example, Anna recalled preparing an engaging, interactive lesson only to find that students could not hear her properly due to poor audio quality, which left her unable to carry out her plans and feeling "utterly disappointed".

Interviewees also talked about technical difficulties faced by their students. Many students lacked access to computers, smartphones, or stable internet connections. In some cases, students prioritized their children's online education over their own, further complicating participation. As one interviewee explained:

> Some students didn't have a fast internet connection, and some others didn't have internet at all. [...] Additionally, some of them had children who needed the only available computer at home for their online classes and homework. The parents gave priority to their children's education, so it was sometimes very difficult for them to participate. (Margaret)

These challenges were particularly pronounced for adult students in Second Chance Schools, who often had limited formal education and minimal experience with digital platforms. Extra efforts are required to assist these students, including providing step-by-step guidance on installing and using teleconferencing tools. For example, one interviewee recounted:

> I installed Webex on their phones one by one ... because when you throw people into the ocean without a life jacket, their first reaction is, 'I'll drown'. (Anna)

Another recurring theme was the lack of institutional support for both students and teachers to adapt to the sudden shift to online learning. Adult educators emphasized that they were not equipped with the necessary resources, such as high-performance computers, cameras, or microphones, to conduct effective online classes. As one participant pointed out:

> Overnight, we needed cameras, and [...] microphones. We were not required to have that kind of equipment in our homes, but suddenly we needed to have all of it. Despite this urgent need, the State has offered no support, not even vouchers to purchase new equipment. (Angela)

This lack of support exacerbated inequalities and placed the burden of adaptation entirely on adult educators and students, exposing systemic issues in educational infrastructure and resource allocation.

In response to these challenges, adult educators and students sought creative alternatives to ensure continuity in teaching and communication. Many turned to social media platforms, which were more familiar and accessible than official teleconferencing tools. For instance, one interviewee described how they created a social media group to facilitate communication with the students:

> I began communicating with the students through a social media group that we have created. Students clearly understood the necessity of doing so and reacted considerately. (John)

Such improvisations highlight the resilience of adult educators and students in navigating the challenges of online learning, often working together to create new "techno-subsystems" that were more aligned with their available resources and technological capacities.

Once reliable communication channels were in place, adult educators had to redefine their teaching presence and roles in the online classroom. This process involved negotiating expectations with students and establishing new routines for synchronous online lessons. Participants described this as an ongoing effort to balance the demands of online instruction with the constraints of technology and individual circumstances.

3.4 *Preparing Lessons and Teaching: Challenges and Adaptations*

The shift to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased the workload of adult educators as they adapted their lessons to an online format. Educators often struggled with limited teleconference platform access and technical constraints. As one interviewee described:

> I didn't sleep until the early hours of the morning. [...] the platform was often inaccessible, at least during the first lockdown, and to be able to upload things, I had to log in at such late hours. (Angela)

Many educators initially attempted to replicate their face-to-face teaching methods in the online environment, adapting their existing materials into digital formats. For instance, one educator mentioned that she created elaborate multimedia presentations to maintain student engagement. Similarly, others converted paper-based tests into digital formats, although this process often introduced new complications, such as editing and correcting student submissions sent as images or PDFs.

Educators soon realized that typical teacher-centered practices, such as lectures and testing, were less effective in the online environment. Experiencing

the new "normal" of a 5-hour daily routine of synchronous lessons on a teleconference platform was not only tiresome, but also quite awkward. To address the lack of engagement, some educators adopted more interactive approaches, such as incorporating frequent Q&A sessions. However, the lack of more meaningful interaction in online lessons was a source of frustration for many educators. For Anna, an English language teacher, it felt like talking to "a black, mute screen". She constantly wondered, "Do they even understand what I'm saying?"

The workload required to enrich lessons with new audio-visual materials often did not translate into meaningful teaching-learning experiences. Despite their best efforts to adapt face-to-face teaching methods in the online environment, the results seemed to be quite disappointing, and the classroom microsystem adaptation was rather unsustainable.

Faced with these challenges, some educators turned to more creative approaches, particularly in workshop-based lessons, which proved to be more engaging and effective. These activities encouraged students to participate in real world, open-ended tasks, fostering interaction, and enthusiasm. For example, one educator described how students in a nursery assistant program created Christmas crafts using materials they had at home:

> They made incredible crafts with scrap materials, sharing their creations in real-time through email, Messenger, or video. It was as if we were in the school's workshop, even though everyone was at home. (Margaret)

Similarly, Nick, a culinary arts teacher, redesigned his workshop to ensure accessibility for all students. Recipes were simplified and tailored to ingredients that were affordable and widely available, enabling students to participate fully from their own kitchens. These creative adaptations highlight how workshop-based lessons offered opportunities for meaningful engagement and collaboration, even in the constraints of an online setting. By focusing on practical, hands-on activities, teachers and students were able to create a more interactive and rewarding learning experience.

3.5 *Work to Family Spillover Effects*

The process of building resilience in the workplace during the lockdown had significant spillover effects on the family/home micro-system. The disruptions required entire households to renegotiate their routines, roles, and responsibilities, often simultaneously. As family members transitioned to remote work, online schooling, or other adjustments, these competing demands created substantial challenges within shared living spaces. Participants reported that physical adjustments were essential to accommodate the new demands of remote work and education. Many described reorganizing or repurposing rooms to

create dedicated workspaces. For example, Mary, a mother of two—one university student and one school pupil—explained that she and her husband used plasterboard to create a third room in their house. Similarly, Angela, a mother of two, said they repurposed their 6-year-old child's bedroom into "the teleconference room", while Helen described how she "ended up taking over one of my children's rooms to work". These adjustments, while practical, often came at a personal cost, as Angela reflected: "I deprived my child of their room".

In addition to spatial changes, families also had to renegotiate their schedules. Participants frequently mentioned negotiating work and study time slots with their spouses and children to avoid conflicts. This often required compromises and sacrifices.

The lack of clear boundaries between work, family, and personal life emerged as a central issue. Participants noted how these blurred boundaries created tensions in their dual roles as educators and parents. Many described feelings of guilt for neglecting their children as work obligations encroached on family time. Angela reflected on this emotional toll: "I felt that I neglected my kids because I was devoting so much time to work". Similarly, Helen shared that "I reduced the amount of time I could spend with my family, especially my children". These overlapping responsibilities often result in emotional and physical exhaustion.

The confusion between what is public and what is private caused a feeling that there is no privacy. Adult educators in order to teach had to expose a part of their private lives, to "open" their homes to strangers. There was a constant feeling of exposure and no spatial distance to mark different social functions between the family and the classroom micro-systems. The transition from one context to another became automatic, and in a matter of seconds, an individual had to make a shift from being a teacher to being a parent and vice-versa.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that building resilience in the professional/work micro-system(s) cannot be isolated from what is going on in the other personally critical micro-systems of an individual's life, particularly family. The COVID-19 lockdown underscored the interdependence of these micro-systems, as challenges in one micro-system inevitably spilled over into others. This interconnectedness suggests that resilience strategies must consider the broader social and personal contexts in which individuals operate.

4 Conclusions

Resilience involves dynamic processes and interactions across the micro-systems of individuals' lives, which are often disrupted by critical events. In moments where normalcy is destabilized, individuals rely on pre-existing

resources and actively seek new ones to restore or reimagine stability. This study focused on adult educators' experiences during the first COVID-19 lockdown in Greece, which disrupted their school-based micro-systems and reshaped their meso-systems—particularly the complex interplay between their work and family lives.

Adult educators faced initial unpreparedness for the shift to emergency remote teaching (ERT). School-based micro-systems had not incorporated teleconferencing into their practices, as macro-system regulations previously prohibited its use. Additionally, precarious employment conditions within the macro-system, including fixed-term contracts, part-time work, and pay-by-the-hour arrangements, left many adult educators juggling multiple jobs. This instability impeded their ability to establish robust workplace micro-systems and adapt effectively to ERT.

Individual responses to ERT varied widely. Some educators leveraged their existing internal resources and digital skills to navigate the transition, while others, lacking these capacities, experienced the shift as coercive. Many began by turning to their meso-systems, seeking support from colleagues and school leaders within their workplace micro-systems. This collaboration fostered a sense of solidarity and strengthened communication channels. In parallel, educators tapped into exo-system resources, such as informal nationwide support networks on social media, which provided practical advice and teaching materials.

However, the exo-system's deluge of e-learning resources created challenges, including information overload, which made it difficult for educators to identify actionable and high-quality materials. Technical limitations within their micro-systems—such as outdated hardware and unstable internet connections—further disrupted synchronous lessons, compelling educators to establish alternative modes of communication to ensure student participation.

As adult educators adapted, they faced pedagogical challenges in translating face-to-face, teacher-centered practices into online micro-systems. Virtual classrooms, often characterized by students' muted microphones and inactive cameras, required a shift in teaching methods. Some educators utilized workshop-based, synchronous lessons that encouraged creativity, engagement, and collaboration. This transition enabled educators to facilitate learning by co-designing activities with students, transforming the norms of physical classrooms into practices more suited to the affordances of digital platforms. The resulting online micro-systems emphasized shared responsibility, fostering sustainability and educational validity in a new context.

The lockdown also blurred the boundaries between work and family micro-systems. The increased workload during the initial stages of ERT strained

educators' meso-systems, forcing difficult choices between establishing effective virtual classrooms and maintaining quality family interactions. This study underscores that resilience in one micro-system, such as the workplace, is interconnected with resilience in other micro-systems, such as the family. The interplay within and between these systems highlights the layered and interdependent nature of resilience during crises.

From a systems perspective, the findings reveal that resilience processes are influenced not only by micro- and meso-system interactions, but also by exo-system and macro-system factors. Government policies, infrastructure limitations, and precarious employment conditions shaped educators' capacities to respond to challenges and innovate within their disrupted environments.

This study's findings illustrate how Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory can illuminate the layered conditions shaping educators' resilience, from immediate micro-system disruptions to broader macro-system constraints. At the same time, Buzzanell's framework helps interpret how adult educators actively constructed meaning and agency through communicative practices, rather than simply reacting to crisis. These theoretical lenses deepen our understanding of resilience as both structurally conditioned and socially enacted.

While the study's qualitative nature limits the generalizability of findings, a key limitation lies in its exclusion of educators who were unable to transition to ERT. Interviewees highlighted cases of colleagues who struggled with online teaching, leading to canceled classes and student dropouts. Exploring such cases in future research could provide deeper insights into the conditions that cause educators and students to lose hope. Such insights could enhance our understanding of resilience during crises and inform policy responses to bolster resilience in educational settings during future crises.

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PART 2

Resources for Adult Educators' Empowerment

CHAPTER 6

On Navigating 'Disruptive' Change

The 'Anchoring' Power of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) for Adult Educators

Stephen O'Brien

Abstract

It feels like we are living and working through a particular period of 'disruptive' change. While this is epitomised by the existential threat to our planet and to our very being, we experience 'disruptive' change in other material, affective and relational ways. Those especially impacted include individuals (Others) who directly experience the trauma associated with growing ill-health, protracted wars, social inequality, identity prejudice and *forced migration* (the thematic focus of this chapter). As adult educators, we may need to develop a more 'phenomenological attitude' to how it is we relate with Others, especially in times of 'disruptive' change. Further, it is proposed that adult educators may need to 'anchor' themselves somewhere; to find a value-based epistemology that informs and encourages them to think more about the world and their everyday 'encounters' therein. This chapter presents Global Citizenship Education (GCE) as a critical opportunity to examine our (implicated) positioning(s) with and for Others.

Keywords

forced migration – 'phenomenological attitude' – Global Citizenship Education (GCE)

1 Introduction

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus is often credited with the view that the only constant in life is change. For many adult educators, particularly those who embrace transformative learning perspectives (e.g., Mezirow, 1991, 2000), change is likewise 'naturalised', it is to be expected, evoked, even embraced. In a phenomenological sense, change is 'encountered' by us all. We experience it,

are 'thrown into it' (Heidegger, 2010) and, as 'beings-in-the-world' (ibid.), we are continually tasked with coping with and making sense of it. So why – assuming we accept the 'natural' state of change, is it still hard to contemplate, let alone experience change? Why is it even more difficult to contemplate and experience so-called 'disruptive' change? In response, we may need to acknowledge not only the 'natural', 'inevitable' recurrence of change, but also its 'affective' force, that is, the sensibilities (moods and attitudes) it evokes, in short, how change *makes us feel*. 'Disruptive' change, in particular, can make us feel differently about ourselves and our relationship to Others and the planet. In times of 'disruptive' change, we may need to 'anchor' ourselves somewhere—philosophically, scientifically, practically. Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is presented in this chapter as having a particular 'anchoring' power for adult educators.

Characteristically, adult education is represented in terms of 'hopeful' change. Of course, learning amongst adult educators and learners can often be mutually fulfilling and may lead to a re-form of old ways of thinking, doing, and being (Freire, 2014). The 'promise of happiness' (Ahmed, 2010) or some other positive outcome is typically held out—an increase in adult learner confidence; a new life opportunity; an intergenerational 'teachable moment' (Freire, 1996), etc., but 'hopeful' change can be elusive, fleeting, even uncertain (O'Brien, 2016). Moreover, for adult educators in particular, the uneven path to change is full of hopes *and* worries (McCarthy & O'Brien, 2020). Thus, along the change journey, adult educators may worry about cumulative managerialist demands (e.g., the fixed framing of professional accountability); they may worry about matching 'hopeful' goals to stubborn hardy realities (e.g., those rooted in sedimented contexts and cultures); and they may constantly worry about how best to meet the ever-increasing needs and interests of a more 'superdiverse' (Vertovec, 2019) learner population. *Worrying*, it seems, is an ever-presence. Yet, despite its persistent *affects*, *worrying* may also come to be thought of as more 'natural' than 'negative'. Taking this phenomenological attitude further, adult educators may come to realize that *worrying* can serve to cultivate their professional identity development. Thus, when adult educators worry, they are confronted with the central 'question concerning Being' (Heidegger, 2010). Beyond an individual reflexive concern, this presents as a particular *relational* question that fosters the possibility of knowing more about one's 'being-in-the world' (ibid.), with Others and with the planet. The promise of hope is still held out in this encounter. With this newfound 'phenomenological attitude', it is later argued; adult educators may better contemplate, cope with, and navigate 'disruptive' change.

2 On Encountering 'Disruptive' Change—The Case of Forced Migration

'Disruptive' change often appears in the literature (e.g., in the field of International Studies) as contrasting with 'incremental' or slow-moving change (e.g., Sinha, 2018). The former may be thought of as a form of dramatic transformation within institutions, systems and society, a form of discontinuous change, like the fall of the Berlin Wall or climate crisis or the fallout from lockdown that may/may not stimulate radical or innovative responses. 'Incremental change', on the other hand, is more associated with continuity or steady re-form within institutions, systems, and society. When one encounters the issue of migration, for example, it may *feel* more 'disruptive' than 'incremental'. *In this sense*, one's affective response is also (at least in part) influenced by bigger affective forces/filters, such as hyperbolic coverage in the media and/or certain political attachments to idealized versions of 'nationhood' or 'securitization'. Add to this a general anxiety that "the world is becoming unhinged" (UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, at the 2023 General Assembly high-level meeting), and it is not difficult to see how migration might be viewed and felt as 'disruptive' change, even if it is, in fact, more likely a form of 'incremental' change, in terms of its cause and effect/affect and policy response history (see later discussions). Of course, this is not to deny that there are many things to worry about (our being) in the world. The circulation of truths (and untruths) concerning global crises adds to such worry. Climate change, for example, is being 'power-fully' denied, while technological solutions and geopolitical interests are prioritized. Asylum seekers or 'International Protection Applicants (IPAs)' are increasingly being de-personalized and politically subjugated. In addition, in real/material and, simultaneously, symbolic ways, the impact of such global crises is being strongly felt at the local level.

Take the *inter-connected* migration issue—migration is ever more linked with climate disaster (Mac Éinrí, 2021)—specifically, the issue concerning the forced displacement of people. The estimated number of international migrants in 2020 was approximately 281 million, equating to 3.6% of the global population (International Organization for Migration, 2022). Despite the perilous (oft-tragic) journey across sea and land, the total number of international migrants has increased over the past five decades (note that this is evidence of 'incremental' change). Those that manage to secure safe passage are often subjected to 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 2001); a form of violence that is imperceptible, permeating in communication, language and feelings about Others, that nevertheless reproduces their subjugation. Through a primary focus on

the *system*—such as the Direct Provision system established in Ireland in 2000 to house asylum seekers while their applications are being assessed—'the natural order of things' (ibid.) remains undisturbed. Thus, systemic solutions and modifications prevail, however morally questionable (Savage & Townsend, 2022), such as the case of the UK's 'offshore' plans to send asylum seekers to Rwanda or to contain them in purpose-built ships. Here, 'the system must hold', literally.[1] Those in power (e.g., former UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and former Home Secretary Suella Braverman) hasten to present themselves as its protectors, safeguarding their country from becoming a "dumping ground" (note the derisory language) for migrants from the EU (McGrath, 2023). Such political attachment is further evidence of 'incremental' change.

Of course, forced migration is experienced differently in different parts of the world. In Ireland there has been a rise in the number of people seeking international protection because of protracted wars, climate disasters, food insecurity, and gender/sexuality persecution. In the year leading up to April 2023, the number of IPAS (International Protection Applicants), people seeking asylum—in Ireland totaled 141,600 persons (which represents a 31% increase from the year to April 2022). This accounts for approximately 1.3% of the EU total in 2022 (European, Migration Network[1]). Steven Vertovec (2019) demonstrates (via his concept of 'superdiversity') that there can be no essentialist understanding of 'migrants'. Thus, the migrant population is of 'multiple origin'—people vary in accordance with their race and ethnicity, their intergenerational, transnational and translanguaging connections, as well as their stratified socio-economic and legal positions (ibid.). Moreover, 'intersectional' dynamics (Crenshaw, 1989) are always at work, with mixed classifications having differential access to public services (crucially, housing, health, and education) and wider social mobility outcomes (such as successful political representation and new employment prospects). In *forced* migration circumstances, people are particularly vulnerable to being dispossessed of key economic, social, cultural, and symbolic forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). They become all too familiar with being *excluded*—firstly, at the borders and throughout their life struggles for increased validation and integration. To get a clearer picture of these migrants' experiences and subjective positionings, it is necessary to get a *sense* (and particularly a 'feeling') for their 'reception' in local communities.

The war in Ukraine, for example, has displaced more than 8 million people, approximately 100,000 of whom have recently arrived in Ireland. In the small towns of Caherdaniel and Cahersiveen in County Kerry (in the Southwest of Ireland), Ukrainian migrants have been broadly welcomed. They now form close to half the population (in the case of the former town) and have been

politically bolstered by a local community who stood with them in opposing their relocation (in the case of the latter). At the same time, the number of asylum seekers from Algeria, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen have exponentially increased and it is these groups (in addition to Ukrainian migrants and Others) who have been subjected to *increased protest* in several locations right across the country. Such protests have garnered greater traction in the wider context of poor national planning, ailing public health services, and a lack of prior consultation with local communities. Notably, protests are centred at the sites of, oft inadequate, institutionalized living spaces, such as re-purposed buildings (like old hotels and offices), which have now been re-established in the midst of a nationwide housing and accommodation crisis. Disturbingly, these protests have sometimes spilt over into violence, such as the increased number of arson cases (15 in 2023) in communities where these new, what are termed, 'International Protection Applicant' (or IPA) Centres were being planned (Reynolds, 2024). While such violent acts are abhorrent to a great many Irish people in those communities,[3] populist attitudes are gaining a foothold. Ominously, protests have been quickly exploited by (hitherto and relatively marginal) far-right groups, such as the National Party and Irish Freedom Party, whose populist agenda it is to stoke fear (e.g., direct provision centres hold 'dangerous men'), spread hate (particularly racial prejudice) and unfurl xenophobic ideology (claiming, as they do, to *keep Ireland for 'the Irish'*). Spectacularly, immigration has been weaponized by such groups, even leading to extensive riots on Dublin's streets in November 2023. Worryingly, this weaponization of immigration is being evermore reflected in some populist factions of mainstream politics. In the run up to Christmas 2023, for example, and in the wake of the burning of a vacant Galway hotel that was due to house asylum seekers, a local politician expressed the intolerant view that "the inn is full".

It is a cynical, cyclical, 'incremental' pattern, too often repeated in history and witnessed, to an ever-greater extent, across the 'developed' countries of modern-day Europe. Such populist attitudes become hardened when we, as a global community, do not learn from the past, as well as when we repeatedly observe, but do not act upon, so-called 'disruptive' change patterns in the present. We know this from the tragedies at Lampedusa—the small Mediterranean island off the southernmost part of Italy. Almost 10 years ago in the airport hangar of Lampedusa, the then President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, stood before hundreds of migrants' coffins and declared "never again". Eight days later, 268 people (including 100 children) lost their lives on the sea between Lampedusa and Malta (Giuffrida, 2023). In September 2023, more than 11,000 migrants (almost double the island's population) arrived from North Africa to seek refuge in Europe. Accompanied by

the right-wing Prime Minister of Italy, Giorgia Meloni, it was the turn of a new President of the European Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen, to visit: "We will decide who comes to Europe and under what circumstances, not the smugglers", she controversially declared (ibid.).

Throughout the years, the asylum *system* has dominated the policy focus on migration and has been presented as (incrementally) 'working well', even though, evidentially, it has not! System modifications thus endure, however morally questionable—for example, the latest EU funding deal with Tunisia which is aimed at stemming so-called 'irregular migration' from North Africa, and the introduction of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum in 2024 that will give first-country-of-entry EU states 'stronger mechanisms' to 'deal' with asylum applicants. Moreover, right-wing sentiments and 'feeling' attachments are newly dispersed with the broadening *affect* of hardening intolerant values and attitudes. At the same time, hopeful protest survives as civil rights groups continue to oppose, inter alia: Conditioning pacts with authoritarian rulers; flagrant human rights arising from the latest 'prevention and detention' strategies; and the refusal of the West to acknowledge its colonial past, in particular its prolonged role in offloading 'problems' on the Global South. Theirs is a hopeful, human struggle which identifies migrants with a "people on the move" and which supports social actions that prioritize "life before borders; not borders before life" (Veizis, 2024).

3 On Developing a Phenomenological Attitude to 'Disruptive' Change

Into this very complex, politically charged "interlocking social space" goes the (implicated) adult educator who "participates in these different spaces with the insights and blind spots they imply" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 32). At a primordial level, the adult educator evermore inter-acts with the migrant adult learner in their everyday encounters. In formal and informal ways, adult educators face the immediate (relational) question of knowing 'who is the migrant adult learner and where are they at?'. Migrant adult learners tell us their stories, including their (oft-difficult) encounters in university. For instance:

> being quoted international college fees despite receiving a meagre weekly allowance and living in a Direct Provision hostel. Barriers such as, not being able to access food or transport while attending college; not being able to get prior education and qualifications recognized and not being able to access student grants or support schemes due to not having the required residency permissions. (*College Connect*, 2021, p. 13)

Adult migrants tell us about their feelings of 'separateness' and 'trauma', their fears around public misperception, their experiences of racism and the negative impact of all the seen counters on their physical and mental health (ibid.). They tell us too about the vital supports they receive through educational grants and scholarships and the representative care they receive from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), such as the Irish Refugee Council and the St Vincent de Paul charity, as well as from individuals (including educators) who frequently go 'above and beyond' (ibid.). Moreover, they tell us that their lives as refugees and as 'International Protection Applicants' (IPAs) matter and that absolute freedom, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), ought to be our common goal "so that every person can enjoy access to higher education in their home countries or anywhere else" (ibid., p. 15). Clearly, there is more work to do in universities, for example, to integrate adult migrant learners. The useful concept of 'hospitable universities' (Kontowski & Leitsberger, 2018), for example, demonstrates the need to welcome refugees as 'strangers', first and foremost, and then establish supports over-and-above a rights-based and/or 'access' approach which is traditionally focused on overcoming practical barriers in the system. 'Hospitable practices' specifically converge on enabling migrant learners' *well-being*, *empowerment* and *social inclusion* (ibid.). In effect/affect, this means moving beyond a respectful engagement with Others' 'lived' experiences to placing primary responsibility on the university to renew *its* practices for *all* its community members. How these 'hospitable practices' *authentically* play out, of course, is work that is still needed to be done!

When encountering Others' stories, adult educators (especially those in closer contact with migrant learners) may be provided with the opportunity to 're-story' themselves (Goodson, 2011, 2013). In a very profound sense, then, those adult educators may come to question 'who they are as human beings' and 'what/who they stand for'. In *affect*, this constitutes a 'phenomenological attitude' to existential knowledge, where upon adult educators take greater care with a phenomenon (such as one's views on, and feelings towards, *migration*), *alongside* (or in tandem with) their 'live' encounters of it. Fiachra Long (2022), in his impressive book *Essays in the Phenomenology of Learning*, offers us key insights into how one may begin to nurture this kind of 'phenomenological attitude'. From the work of Edmund Husserl (1975), for example, Long (2022, pp. 45–64) reminds that we may need to 'move out of our comfort zones' to suspend or 'bracket off' conventional appearances and 'natural attitudes' (we might think here of some media reporting on migration) towards consciously 'getting back to' the living phenomenon itself (we might think here about cause-and-effect and critical reasoning over-and-above populist

thinking). From the work of Martin Heidegger (2010), Long reminds that there is always an emotive, relational connection with a phenomenon; we positionally 'feel' ('fear' and/or 'anxiety' and/or 'inadequacy', etc.) *in relation to migration*, for example, *alongside* (or in-tandem with) our gradual 'live' encounters with Others who more directly experience it (Long, 2022, pp. 65–97). And, from the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2010), Long reminds that our closest encounters with any phenomenon are always located in bodily experience; that our mind *and* body 'reach out', in a 'feedback loop' connection, to it (e.g., our evolving inter-actions with migrant learners); and that each new sensorial experience becomes "inscribed in our bodily being as a habit, an action, a modulation in one's living capacity" (ibid., p. 104). Migration may even *move us* to protest, either for or against integration centres within our own locales. From such phenomenological perspectives, Long (2022) argues for greater 'proximity' or 'closeness' or 'nearness' to the phenomenon under learning focus. Thus, having a 'phenomenological attitude' means that adult educators (especially those who more regularly encounter migrant learners) can never be indifferent to migration; that they are obliged to critically examine its meaningfulness in their own personal/professional life context; and that, only by worrying, Long (2022) emphasizes 'puzzlement', about the deeper experiences of life, can they be stimulated 'out of [their] ignorance' (ibid.). *Worrying* then is a necessary, ever-present fact that may actually serve to cultivate one's personal/professional identity. When adult educators worry, they are confronted with the central 'question concerning Being' (Heidegger, 2010). From a phenomenological perspective, this presents as a particular *relational* question that fosters the possibility of knowing more about one's 'being-in-the world' (ibid.), with Others and with the planet. A most profound challenge is thus set forth for the adult educator: 'Who am I and what/who do I stand for?'

4 The 'Anchoring' Power of Global Citizenship Education (GCE)

It goes without saying that this is not an easy question to address. A 'phenomenological attitude', as highlighted by the greatest philosophical thinkers on the subject,[4] is hard to grasp not least because we are enveloped by the endless signs of careless conventions and attitudes (Baudrillard, 1994). It is hard too to nurture a 'phenomenological attitude' to migration if one has not momentarily thought about and/or experienced it in one's own personal/professional context. Even if one has momentarily thought about and/or experienced it, it may still be easier *not to worry*, after all, it may be rationalized, *how can I make*

a difference? It is contended here that adult educators may need more support to nurture a 'phenomenological attitude' towards so-called 'disruptive' change, and *migration* explicitly. They may need to be 'anchored' somewhere—specifically, in a value-based epistemology that informs and encourages them to think more about the world and their everyday 'encounters' with Others. Adult education has a long tradition of developing critical literacy with and for adult learners in the interest of nurturing a vibrant public sphere that safeguards democracy (Fleming, 2024). In its own right, adult education is an important means of understanding contemporary 'crises' and positing 'emancipatory counter tendencies' (ibid.). We can look here, for example, to the work of John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Oskar Negt, amongst others (ibid.). At the same time, adult educators can extend theoretical and practical inter-connections to help them develop new 'teachable moments' (Freire, 1996) and 'root' them deeper in real-world issues. Global Citizenship Education (GCE)—a field of inter-related disciplines focused on developing a world informed by the core values of social justice, equality and sustainability—is presented in this paper as offering adult educators this 'anchoring' power.

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is rooted in critical theory and draws from a variety of inter-related disciplines, including *inter alia*: Critical feminism; postcolonial theory; social class theory; critical race theory; disability studies; queer theory; interculturalism; and critical postmodernism. Its collective purpose—oft drawing on a 'bricolage' (Kincheloe, 2001) of such critical lenses—is to develop a living understanding of, and commitment to, education for global citizenship, sustainable development, and social justice. In pursuit of this purpose, its pedagogical intent is to employ education as an effective (and *affective*) means of nurturing active citizenry. In essence, the *education* element of GCE is concerned with teaching and learning through a global justice lens. Thus, while drawing on broader critical theory perspectives, there is a particular pedagogical focus on, *inter alia*: Development Education (DE); Human Rights Education; Education for Sustainable Development (ESD); Environmental Education; Multicultural Education; Peace Education; Community Education; Indigenous Education; and Critical Pedagogy or 'Praxis'. Mutually, such perspectives emphasise the key role of the educator in enabling, via democratic, creative, and active-based methods, *all* learners to cultivate their global citizenry knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. This means enhancing learners' awareness, understandings, principles, feelings and 'know-how' *in relation to* (or *alongside*) an ever-changing, interdependent and unequal world (Irish Aid, 2017). It means finding an epistemological base—GCE is a 'joint fit' here, to critically examine the root causes of global-local

justice issues and explore our (implicated) positionings with Others and with the planet. Especially in times of worry, it means offering educators *inspiration and hope* to make some positive difference (however small) in the world.

Doing GCE work is itself inter-dependent on conditions of possibility and/or constraint both *within* education systems and *without*. With respect to the former, it needs to be acknowledged that socially conscious educators may regularly attempt to make their teaching 'responsive' or 'sustaining' (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This is particularly true of those with a strong vocational commitment, as well as those who reflect carefully on their 'thrownness' (Heidegger, 2010) into new diverse learning environments. At the same time, education systems can be traditionally sluggish to establish support structures, innovative curriculum and assessment mechanisms, and pedagogical approaches. This is particularly true of programmes that emphasise *training*, over-and-above *education*, and that reduce knowledge to 'technological enframing' (Irwin, 2015) and narrow measures of 'success' (O'Brien, 2016). Consequently, the cultural capacity for meaningful GCE effort is often restricted and left to committed individuals to perform its work (Bryan, 2011). With respect to issues *outside* (that are nonetheless related to) the education system, Daly et al. (2016) especially critique 'trickle down' economic growth (read as, the endless neoliberal 'development' model) that often reproduces (*not redresses*) global-local forms of inequality. The point to be made here is that 'development' remains as much an incomplete project in the Global North, as it is in the Global South. There are, however, some signs of progression concerning policy interventions. At supra-national state level, for example, there is increasing validation for GCE since it promotes a "sense of belonging to a broader community" and serves as a way of "understanding, acting and relating oneself to others and the environment in space and in time" (UNESCO, 2014, p. 14). At a national level, the (second) National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland entitled, *ESD to 2030*, provides a framework to support and steer the contribution of the education sector around 5 key action areas: (1) Advancing policy; (2) transforming learning environments; (3) building capacities of educators; (4) empowering and mobilizing young people; and (5) accelerating local level actions. With specific focus on teachers' professional development, it is noteworthy that the new *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education* identifies GCE as one of 7 core elements that must underpin all aspects of teacher education programmes in Ireland (Teaching Council, 2020, p. 14). Thus, it is expected that future adult educators will integrate into their teaching new value-based knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that seek to build a more peaceful, just and sustainable world. In *affect*, this authenticates the importance of 'worry', as adult educators are encouraged to work on them 'selves' and work with Others in these 'disruptive' times.

Worrying then may be necessary, but it need not be overwhelming or disheartening. 'Disruptive' change can often emit feelings of unease, anxiety, and/or fear. In re-action to this, GCE promotes a range of affirming pedagogical practices. Specifically, GCE inspires educators to become more at ease with: Asking questions, however 'contentious' (Hess & McAvoy, 2015); exploring diverse viewpoints and values; making new inter-connections at global-local levels; responding as active global citizens; and embracing more holistic approaches to assessment (Oxfam, 2015). *Sensibly*, there are a myriad of resources available to help educators teach more inclusively, including links with: Irish Aid; Oxfam; Irish Development Education Authority (IDEA); World Wise Global Schools (WWGS); Global Action Plan; and The Ubuntu Network. Perhaps the most valuable resource, however, is the educator him/her 'self' whose newfound 'phenomenological attitude' can foster greater learning enjoyment (Noddings, 2003) and can help learners "to travel together differently in a foggy road—with the stamina for the long-haul rather than a desire for quick fixes" (Andreotti et al., 2018, p. 17). While it may be challenging for educators to become comfortable with (and prepared for) co-engaging with diverse learners (Hagan & McGlynn, 2004; Conway et al., 2011; O'Brien & Cotter, 2018), there are methodological supports on *how to teach differently*, for different purposes and with different learners in mind. This involves the use of participatory, creative, and active learning methods (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Leonardo, 2009). This involves practicing authentic democratic experiences and committing to the critical act of teaching (Freire, 1996; Giroux, 2020). Moreover, this involves courageous experimentation and responsible risk taking (Donnelly, Hoy & O'Brien, 2023), which enables educators and learners to learn and 'unlearn' together (Simpson, 2019).

5 Conclusion—on Navigating 'Disruptive' Change

In storying together, we are challenged to hold on to a meaningful narrative for our*selves*; to decide 'whose side we are on'. This helps us (re-)frame our 'life politics' (Goodson, 2011), expand our solidarity connections and value the work we do in the 'small spaces of education'. At the same time, we may still struggle to 'read the world' (Freire & Macedo, 1987) and not *feel* some degree of despair and hopelessness. It is not hard to *sense* why. Climate anxiety is real, with more people feeling depressed, frustrated, angry, and voiceless *alongside* devastating changes to our ecosystem (Hickman, 2020). Protracted and cumulative wars—with attendant violations of international humanitarian law—generate unfathomable misery for civilian populations. Many are forced to

migrate—both within and across national borders. All of us, at some level, are implicated in how we feel and re-act *alongside* our elected leaders who powerfully (re-)frame and (re-)solve (or increasingly compound) 'disruptive' change events; the migration phenomenon, in particular, how it is spoken about and 'incrementally' managed; and the rise of 'pervasive and relentless' racism in Europe (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023). Sometimes we get it right—for example, our collective agreement, and action on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); though the extent to which we have got these 'right(s)' is a moot point. At the same time, we get it wrong—for example, the spread of authoritarian entrenchment and the weaponization of immigration, as well as democratic backsliding that negatively impacts the goal of 'securing peace and justice and strong institutions' (SDG 16). In this *sense*, we are always challenged to work towards a better world. At this moment in time, we are manifestly challenged to work towards a new world order and away from power vetoes and extremist postures which are "marching steadily into the mainstream" (Henley, 2023, p. 1). Adult education plays a vital role in this new re-vision. In particular, adult education has the power to help us imagine and revolutionize the way we think and act—even in the darkest of times (Fleming, 2024).

For adult educators, worrying about the 'bigger (global) picture' is always there and it can be particularly difficult to navigate these 'disruptive' moods. Adult educators (especially those who regularly encounter migrant learners) work 'in the here and now' where *global-local encounters* unfold. They directly understand and experience the new demographic realities of the learning space—in Ireland, for example, 1 in 5 people are now born abroad (Central Statistics Office, 2022). They appreciate that when adults directly encounter migration, many undergo deep transitions—"not only geographically, but also culturally, socially, linguistically and practically" (Barkoglou & Gravani, 2020). Moreover, they understand, through cumulative 'encounters' with migrant learners' lives, that changes to their own identity and practices are inevitable (ibid.). Adult educators may *feel* empathy with migrants' 'lived' concerns over Direct Provision policy and accommodation, including the newest government plans to 'host' increased migrant flows and systems (McNally, 2023). They may *feel* unqualified to provide 'reasonable accommodation' in their own support for migrant learners; less confident to *act* to alleviate their relative disadvantage. In addition, they may *feel* overwhelmed by this (implicated) responsibility to 'make a difference'.

It is important to recognize that these feelings are real. A 'phenomenological attitude' can offer adult educators the opportunity to pause, reflect, and renew their frame of mind. Specifically, a 'phenomenological attitude' to migration

encourages adult educators to: *Care-fully reflect* on the fact that 'disruptive' change is a consequence of 'incremental' inaction; develop *meaningful* (*re-*) *actions* in one's immediate 'lived' context; and, ultimately, accept and value the importance of *worry*. When adult educators worry about migration, they are confronted with the central 'question concerning Being' (Heidegger, 2010) and with creating a meaningful narrative for them*selves alongside* Others. This is key to their own personal/professional development and well-being. Of course, adult educators cannot do this important work alone. Good inclusionary practices—for and with adult migrant learners—comply with, and are in the spirit of, progressive legislation and policy; are modeled in the mission and work of universities; are accompanied by effective data monitoring and analysis processes (at institutional and national levels); and are widely acted upon in teaching/tutoring spaces to raise critical awareness, challenge radicalism and positively transform implicit and unconscious forms of bias. GCE has an important role to play in this *sense*. GCE can enable adult educators 'go to the well' to: Become more knowledgeable about cause-effect (and cause-*affect*) changes; find one's relational place in the world; and help alleviate the symptoms of anxiety, fear, and/or hopelessness. GCE can inspire renewed hope and *action*. And, in navigating 'disruptive' change, GCE can offer a special 'anchoring' power.

Notes

1 Recent Irish rules for new arrivals (from Ukraine) were introduced from 2024. The changes include limiting state accommodation to 90 days and cutting the welfare rate from 220 euros to 38.80 euros per week for the duration of stay in state accommodation. The Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee, commented that these changes seek to ensure that "there is no pull factor" for those leaving Ukraine (see https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2023/1211/1421286-ireland-ukraine/). Quite aside from the typical association of 'migration' with 'choice', this indicates the pressure (increasingly felt by Irish politicians) to safeguard the dictum, 'the system must hold' (even if it is a struggle to 'hold', owing to a lack of planning and/or resolve and/or physical capacity). Following a European People's Party (EPP) Congress meeting in Bucharest in March 2024, Ireland's Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Leo Varadkar, said that he was in favour of processing applications for 'irregular migrants' in countries outside the European Union. This appears to mirror the policy of exporting migration, as in the UK, with the effect/affect of expanding the dictum, 'the system must hold (elsewhere)'.

2 https://emn.ie/

3 Following an arson attack on one planned IPA Centre for 85 Ukrainian refugees in 2024, one community resident, Loretta Gallaher, made her heartfelt objections known: "It was all a very happy place 'til this happened and I think everybody in Lanesborough [in County Longford] will agree with me, it's an absolute disgust and a heartbreak [...] Do you think Ukrainians would come here if their country was peaceful? [...] I'm so mad that somebody would come to our beautiful town and do such a horrible, horrible thing" (RTE News, January 19, 2024).

4 I am thinking here too of Simone de Beauvoir's concept of 'existential ambiguity' that characterises human existence and the constant search for meaning; as well as her concept of 'discomfort' and its role in creating for one's 'self' new creative and ethical ways of thinking and being.

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CHAPTER 7

Fostering Resilience in Adult Educators

The Role of a Competence Validation Scheme (Greta) in Supporting Their Professional Development and Well-Being

Brigitte Bosche and Susanne Lattke

Abstract

The GRETA Competence Model provides a comprehensive theoretical framework that captures the range of pedagogical competence requirements for educators in adult education. The chapter examines the model as well as the related competence validation procedure for adult educators in Germany, highlighting its potential to empower them and strengthen their mental resilience amid growing professional challenges in times of crisis.

The GRETA competence validation procedure was developed to provide a framework for validating the competencies of teachers in adult education and to foster their professional development by offering feedback and guidance on their learning journey. It allows adult educators to have their competencies assessed and documented according to scientific standards. Originally designed to support professionalisation in the largely unregulated field of adult education, it helps educators without formal qualifications showcase their skills and improve their job prospects. A survey of GRETA users revealed additional benefits, such as increased job satisfaction, stronger professional identity, and greater motivation for development. Based on the survey findings and using an analytical grid of four resilience factors derived heuristically from the literature, the chapter analyses GRETA's potential for fostering resilience among adult educators. To this end, it first examines the links between the GRETA Competence Model and the resilience concept, and then goes on to explore the related validation procedure focusing on its resilience-promoting elements.

Keywords

resilience – adult educators – competence recognition – self-efficacy – reflection

1 The Context

Adult education in Germany is a largely unregulated field with no standardized training pathways. While high demands are placed on educators, there are no binding qualification standards, meaning many enter the profession without formal pedagogical training.

The reality of working in adult education is shaped by diverse conditions. This is especially true for those who work as teachers or trainers. We focus on this group when we refer to *adult educators* in the following. Although approximately 77% of adult educators hold an academic degree, it is often not in pedagogy (Autor: innen gruppe Bildungs berichter stattung, 2024). Many of them do this work as career changers or as a sideline. As there is no fixed job profile for adult educators, there is little visibility and consequently little social recognition for their work.

The employment conditions of adult educators are often precarious, particularly for those working as freelancers. Despite the high qualifications typically required for these roles, remuneration and job security frequently fall short. Many adult educators work on a freelance basis with insecure contracts and are paid solely for the lessons they deliver, receiving no compensation for preparation or follow-up work. Their average gross income is significantly lower than that of schoolteachers and the general population. Moreover, a large proportion of trainers lack adequate social security coverage, as they must finance their own health insurance, pension, and unemployment insurance (Martin et al., 2016).

This already fragile situation has reached a crisis level in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these challenges, as many courses were cancelled or moved online without adequate support for adult educators. This led to a significant exodus of professionals, worsening an already strained workforce. In a survey conducted in 2021, 81% of training providers reported that the situation placed a high level of psychological stress on their employees and freelance staff. 32% of providers reported that employees were afraid of losing their jobs, and 70% stated that many of their freelance staff were in financial difficulties due to cancelled teaching assignments (Kohl & Denzl, 2021).

At the individual level, these precarious conditions have serious implications for the resilience of adult educators. Constant job insecurity, financial instability, and a lack of institutional support create high levels of stress and emotional strain. Without stable employment and adequate social security, educators struggle to maintain professional motivation and long-term career prospects. The absence of reliable income and protection against economic downturns further undermines their ability to adapt to challenges and sustain

engagement in the profession. Over time, this erodes not only their well-being, but also the overall quality of adult education, as experienced professionals exit the field due to burnout and financial pressure.

1.1 *The GRETA Competence Validation Project*

As early as 2014, with funding from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the involvement of eight umbrella organizations in adult and continuing education, the GRETA project was initiated. GRETA aimed to develop and implement a framework for recognizing competencies acquired informally by teachers in adult education. The project was not specifically conceived in response to acute crisis phenomena such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Its overarching objective was to offer adult educators a recognition of their competence enhance rofessionalization in adult education and thereby strengthen a sector that, compared to other areas of education, receives considerably less attention from both policymakers and the general public.

Before the validation procedure was developed, an initial step involved creating a competence model for the professional skills of adult educators. Building on the model the validation procedure called GRETA-PortfolioPlus was created and implemented. After two years, the Portfolio Plus was evaluated by means of an online survey of adult educators who had completed the validation process. The survey findings revealed that many users derived personal benefits from the GRETA process, such as higher motivation and greater job satisfaction.

Building on these findings, this paper sets out to investigate the question in which ways the GRETA competence validation can contribute to strengthening the personal resilience of adult educators. GRETA is considered here as a representative example of competence validation procedures in general. Our interest lies in examining which elements of competence validation processes are conducive to fostering resilience and where such procedures encounter limitations in this regard.

To this end, we first present four relevant factors of resilience that we have derived from an exploratory literature analysis (Section 2). Subsequently, we will use these factors as heuristic framework in order to analyze the GRETA competence validation with regard to its potential for fostering resilience (Section 3). In doing so we will examine both the theoretical-conceptual foundation of the process, namely the GRETA competence model (3.1), and the practical implementation of the validation procedure with the online tool PortfolioPlus (3.2). In order to empirically substantiate our analysis, we rely on the results of the evaluation, which are based on both quantitative and qualitative data. We conclude the chapter by discussing and critically reflecting on our findings.

2 Theoretical Background: The Concept of (Teacher) Resilience

Resilience lacks a universally accepted definition, with varying conceptualizations framing it as a trait, a process, or an outcome (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). Most definitions, however, emphasise the two elements adversity and positive adaptation.

Initially introduced into psychology in the 1950s, resilience was first considered a stable personality trait (Block & Block, 1980). This view shifted with the rise of modern resilience research, particularly through the work of Emmy E. Werner, whose Kauai Study (Werner, 1989) demonstrated that resilience is a dynamic process influenced by lifelong learning and experience.

Resilience is now mostly understood as an interaction between individuals and their environment, where coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies develop over time. Context-sensitive models further highlight the interplay of personal and systemic factors (Mansfield et al., 2016).

The resilience of (school) teachers has been extensively researched, with numerous protective factors for resilience being identified (for an overview of such studies, see Beltman, 2011; Mansfield et al., 2016; Mu et al., 2024). Based on Mansfield et al. (2016), these protective factors can be grouped into three categories: "personal resources", meaning individual traits or intrapersonal factors such as motivation, efficacy, sense of purpose, optimism, sense of vocation, job satisfaction and others; "contextual resources", such as collegial support, positive peer relationships, supportive school leadership, trust, autonomy, opportunities for participation and others; and "strategies" or behavioural approaches such as work-life balance, problem solving strategies, goal setting, setting boundaries, reflection, humour, communication, help seeking and others (Mansfield et al., 2016).

In the following, we will take a closer look at four of these factors that seem particularly relevant for our purpose, i.e., to determine the potential of the GRETA model and the validation process to strengthen resilience in adult educators. Based on the research literature on resilience, we have selected the following four factors as they offer particular points of connection to the GRETA model and competence validation procedures: Self-Efficacy, Professional Identity, Relationships, and Reflection. In order to be able to analyze these connections in Chapter 3, we will first introduce the four factors in more detail and highlight their main features and characteristics that are relevant for our purpose.

2.1 *Self-efficacy*

Self-efficacy can be seen as a teacher's belief in their ability to manage classroom situations and facilitate learning and is a key predictor of resilience

(Beltman et al., 2011). Howard and Johnson (2004) found in a study of teacher resilience in disadvantaged schools that resilient teachers exhibited a strong sense of competence and agency, aligning with Bandura's social cognitive theory, which emphasizes self-efficacy's role in overcoming challenges (Mu et al., 2024).

Empirical research supports the reciprocal relationship between self-efficacy and resilience (Mansfield, 2020). Teachers with high self-efficacy are more resilient, while resilient experiences reinforce self-efficacy (Mu et al., 2024). Two specific dimensions, efficacy in student engagement and efficacy in instructional strategies, have been found to be particularly influential in strengthening teacher resilience (Mu et al., 2024).

Although further research is needed to clarify causality, existing studies suggest that fostering self-efficacy enhances teacher resilience. Supporting self-efficacy thus helps teachers not just to endure, but to thrive in their profession (Beltman et al., 2011).

2.2 *Professional Identity*

A strong professional identity, characterized by a clear sense of purpose and alignment with one's role, significantly contributes to teacher resilience. Teachers with a well-developed professional identity have found to be better equipped to handle adversity and sustain motivation (Beltman et al., 2011).

Gu and Day (2007) highlight that professional and personal identities influence how teachers navigate challenges. A positive professional identity fosters intrinsic motivation and commitment (Mansfield, 2020). Additionally, collective professional identity enhances social support and efficacy, reducing stress and improving well-being (Junker et al., 2021).

Beltman et al. (2011) found that professional identity develops over time through reflective practice and engagement with the teaching community. Strengthening this identity in teacher training and ongoing professional development therefore may enhance resilience, helping teachers remain motivated and effective despite challenges.

2.3 *Relationships*

From a perspective that sees resilience as a collective process, such as in Ungar's (2008) social ecological model, strong social and professional relationships are seen as particularly crucial for the development of resilience, as they provide emotional support and practical help.

Resilient teachers benefit from strong personal and professional relationships, including peer support from colleagues. Fostering strong professional networks enables teachers to build and maintain resilience, mitigating stress and enhancing professional well-being (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Supportive

leadership enhances enthusiasm, autonomy, and professional growth (Cameron & Lovett, 2014). Mentoring relationships play a vital role, especially for early-career teachers, positively influencing job satisfaction, and professional identity (Castro et al., 2010). Not least, teacher-student relationships also provide resilience-enhancing support (Gu & Day, 2007).

2.4 *Reflection*

Reflection is widely acknowledged as a vital component of resilience. Fonagy and Target (2002) contend that mentalisation—the capacity to understand and interpret one's own and others' mental states—is fundamental to psychological well-being, making reflective practices essential to resilience.

In the context of teacher training and professional development, the importance of reflection is particularly pronounced. Howard and Johnson (2004) observed that resilient teachers credited their ability to navigate challenges to reflective practices. Reflection is believed to enhance resilience by promoting self-awareness, adaptability, ongoing professional learning, and effective coping strategies (Leroux & Théorêt, 2014). Consequently, incorporating structured reflective practices into teacher education and professional development, including innovative approaches such as art-based reflective methods (McKay & Barton, 2018), is frequently recommended to foster teachers' capacity to manage stress and sustain long-term well-being.

3 Analyzing GRETA through the Lens of Resilience

Building on the theoretical considerations outlined in the previous section, this chapter examines the GRETA competence validation scheme in relation to the resilience factors identified earlier. In doing so, we will inevitably also touch on the relationship between professionalisation and the promotion of resilience.

To structure our analysis, we distinguish between two key dimensions of GRETA: its conceptual foundation, represented by the GRETA Competence Model (Alberti et al., 2023), and its practical implementation, embodied in the competence validation procedure. By investigating these dimensions in light of the resilience factors discussed in Section 2, we seek to determine how competence validation processes can support resilience and where their potential limitations lie.

3.1 *The Conceptual Dimension: The GRETA Competence Model*

The GRETA Competence Model aims to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework that captures the full range of pedagogical competence

requirements for educators in adult education. Before GRETA, no unified framework existed to guide professional development or facilitate the recognition of teaching expertise, making it difficult to establish common standards and support career progression in the sector.

The development of the GRETA model was informed by established theoretical frameworks from school education, particularly the work of Baumert and Kunter (2006). Their models were carefully adapted to reflect the distinct challenges and demands of adult education, acknowledging that teaching in this context differs significantly from school-based instruction in terms of learner autonomy, heterogeneity, and professional trajectories. A key feature of the model development process was the active involvement of a broad spectrum of practitioners and umbrella organizations from the field. By incorporating their perspectives and experiences, the model was designed to be both theoretically robust and practically relevant. This participatory approach also fostered a sense of ownership and identification among stakeholders, strengthening the model's legitimacy and acceptance across the sector (Strauch et al., 2021).

Another key feature of the GRETA model is its holistic understanding of competence, drawing on Weinert's widely recognized conceptualisation. Weinert (2001) defines competencies as "the cognitive abilities and skills possessed by individuals or that can be learned by them, which enable them to solve certain problems, as well as the associated motivational, volitional, and social readiness and capacities to use the solutions successfully and responsibly in variable situations" (Authors' translation, orig. in German). This definition highlights the multidimensional nature of competence, encompassing not only cognitive skills, but also affective and motivational components, attitudes, beliefs, and overarching personal and transversal abilities. By adopting this broad understanding, the GRETA model reflects the complexity of professional competence in adult education, acknowledging that effective teaching is shaped by a dynamic combination of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and self-regulatory capacities.

Developed as a scientifically grounded reference model, based on Baumert and Kunter (2006), GRETA serves as the foundation for the systematic validation of adult educators' competencies. Crucially, it was designed to be overarching, ensuring its applicability across the highly diverse landscape of adult education, which spans a wide array of institutional contexts, learner groups, subjects, and teaching formats. The model addresses a long-standing gap in the field: the absence of a shared, research-based understanding of the skills, knowledge, and dispositions essential for effective teaching in adult education.

Structurally, the GRETA Competence Model (Figure 7.1) is organized into four overarching competence aspects (outer ring), which are further divided

FIGURE 7.1 Structure of the GRETA competence model

into twelve competence areas inner ring) and twenty-three specific competence facets (middle ring).

This layered structure allows for a nuanced and differentiated representation of teaching competencies, ensuring that both foundational and advanced aspects of professional practice are adequately captured.

Although GRETA was designed as a model of professional competence for adult educators rather than a model of resilience, the brief presentation above already suggests that its holistic structure intersects with key aspects of resilience in multiple ways. We have examined this initial impression more closely by comparing the definitions of individual GRETA competence facets (Alberti et al., 2023) with the resilience factors outlined in Section 1. In the following section, we present the results of this comparison and demonstrate where and how these four resilience factors are embedded within the GRETA model.

3.1.1 Self-efficacy

1. Self-efficacy refers to an educator's belief in their ability to influence learning outcomes and effectively manage teaching situations. The GRETA competence facet *Self-Efficacy* directly addresses this resilience component, emphasizing the importance of confidence in one's teaching abilities. This supports the idea that teachers with strong self-efficacy are better equipped to handle setbacks, adapt to challenges, and sustain motivation.
2. The facet *Pedagogical values* refer to educators' confidence in their pedagogical decisions and ethical stances, enabling them to handle complex teaching scenarios with conviction and maintain a sense of control over their work.
3. The facet *Coping with Feedback and Criticism* reinforces self-efficacy by emphasizing constructive engagement with evaluative input. The ability to use feedback for professional growth enhances resilience by fostering confidence and adaptability.
4. Additionally, the competence area *Professional Experience* with its two facets *Reflection on teaching practice* and *Professional development* highlights the importance of ongoing reflection strengthens a teacher's sense of competence and self-efficacy over time.

3.1.2 Professional Identity

1. With the facet *Awareness of Own Professional Role* the GRETA model acknowledges the shifting nature of the teaching profession, emphasizing that educators must critically reflect on diverse role expectations (e.g., facilitator, guide, trainer, mentor). This aligns with research indicating that a strong professional identity fosters intrinsic motivation and role clarity, both crucial for resilience (Gu & Day, 2007).
2. The facet *Subjective Assumptions About Learning and Teaching* highlights how educators' implicit and explicit beliefs about their role influence their ability to navigate challenges.
3. The facet *Commitment and Distance* explicitly recognizes the need for teachers to regulate their engagement levels, ensuring they do not reach a state of exhaustion, which is crucial for sustaining resilience in demanding educational contexts.

3.1.3 Relationships

1. The facet *Group Facilitation and Management* highlights the role of educators in creating supportive learning environments and fostering collaborative group dynamics. This aligns with the notion that resilience is

strengthened through peer interaction and shared problem-solving (Li & Chen, 2024).

2. The facet *Professional Communication* emphasizes the importance of constructive dialogue, conflict resolution, and fostering a positive communicative culture. These skills are critical for building strong relationships with different actors that support resilience.
3. The facet *Teamwork/Collaboration and Networking* emphasizes the ability to engage in professional networks, collaborate with colleagues, and share best practices. Thereby it enhances resilience by providing access to emotional and practical support in challenging situations.
4. The facet *Enthusiasm* contributes to resilience by reinforcing intrinsic motivation and emotional engagement in teaching. Educators who demonstrate enthusiasm create a positive atmosphere, which in turn strengthens their professional relationships and support networks.

3.1.4 Reflection

1. The GRETA competence facet *Coping with Feedback and Criticism* encapsulates this reflective dimension, encouraging educators to view feedback as a tool for growth rather than a source of discouragement.
2. The facet *Reflection on Own Teaching Practice* explicitly encourages educators to evaluate their experiences, identify challenges, and adapt their methods accordingly. This iterative process is essential for resilience, as it allows teachers to develop adaptive strategies for overcoming obstacles.
3. Within *Outcome Orientation*, the model emphasizes that educators should align their teaching with learning outcomes and adjust their approach based on feedback. This reflective process ensures continuous improvement and strengthens problem-solving skills in the face of pedagogical challenges.
4. The facet *Diagnostics and Learning Guidance* also incorporates reflection by encouraging teachers to analyze learners' needs and adapt their teaching accordingly.
5. In addition, the definitions of the more technically orientated competence facets under the competence aspect *Professional Knowledge Skills*, e.g., the facets *Teaching and Learning Methods* or *Learning content and objectives*, always include a requirement to make decisions, e.g., for the choice of a particular method or a particular learning content, in a reflected, i.e., conscious and reasoned manner.

The above results from the comparison reveal that the two competence aspects focusing on *Professional Values and Beliefs* and *Professional Self-Management* exhibit clear and consistent connections to resilience across nearly

all competence facets, particularly in relation to the factors of *Self-Efficacy* and *Professional Identity*. In contrast, the resilience-related elements within the two competence aspects that are more directly concerned with professional knowledge appear somewhat less frequently and are often more implicit in nature. However, the factor of *Relationships* plays a significant role within the *Professional Knowledge and Skills* aspect, particularly in terms of the ability to build and maintain relationships with various groups. Meanwhile, *Reflection* is explicitly represented as a distinct competence facet in the model, but it also operates as a more implicit underlying theme embedded across numerous other facets.

All in all, the above considerations show that a comprehensive conceptualisation of professional competence for adult educators, as undertaken in the GRETA model, exhibits significant overlap with key resilience factors. It seems therefore reasonable to assume that an adult educator who meets the criteria of professionalism as defined by the GRETA model is also likely to possess a solid foundation of resilience.

3.2 *The Practical Dimension: The PortfolioPlus*

GRETA is not merely a theoretical construct. It was developed to provide a framework for validating the competencies of teachers in adult education and to foster their professional development by offering feedback and guidance on their learning journey.

In the following sections, we will examine how the GRETA validation procedure relates to resilience and explore its potential to enhance resilience. To this end, we will first present and analyze the procedure to identify elements that promote resilience. Subsequently, we will present some relevant data from an evaluation of the validation procedure.

3.2.1 The Validation Procedure: Recognizing Teachers' Skills with PortfolioPlus

Building on the competence model, the GRETA-PortfolioPlus was developed as a web-based tool in form of a questionnaire for documenting and validating the competencies of teachers in adult education. It provides educators, regardless of their experience, employment status, or subject area, with the opportunity to reflect on the competencies they have acquired through formal, non-formal, and informal learning pathways (Bosche et al., 2018).

The PortfolioPlus comprises 66 questions related to the planning and delivery of learning opportunities for adults as well as questions on their professional roles, values, and attitudes. The questionnaire includes both multiple-choice items and open-ended tasks in which teachers are asked, for instance, to reflect on, analyze, and evaluate typical scenarios encountered in everyday

teaching and learning contexts. Users of the PortfolioPlus are thus required not only to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, but also to articulate how they professionally respond to challenges such as unforeseen changes in circumstances, how they manage feedback, stress, and change more broadly.

Once the questionnaire has been completed, the responses are evaluated by certified assessors using predefined indicators. For each response, users can attain one of four possible competence levels within a specific competence facet. These four levels are based on the taxonomy of learning objectives developed by Bloom and his successors (Krathwohl et al., 2009), covering both cognitive and affective competencies. After all responses have been assessed, the online system automatically generates a graphical representation of the candidate's competence profile, indicating the level achieved in each of the 23 competence facets.

In addition, the assessors produce a written report of approximately two to three pages, which provides a qualitative explanation of the candidate's competence profile, illustrated with selected examples from their professional practice. These examples are drawn from the candidate's open-ended responses in the PortfolioPlus. The graphical representation and the written report together constitute the "GRETA competence balance", which is initially sent to the candidate as a provisional PDF document for their information.

The final stage of the process involves a bilateral feedback discussion between the assessor and the adult educator, typically conducted online and lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The assessor organizes this feedback discussion by contacting the adult educator by email and arranging an appointment. This discussion offers both parties the opportunity to reflect on the entire process as equals. Any open questions regarding the assessment results can be addressed, and the assessor provides verbal feedback on how they interpreted the candidate's profile based on their PortfolioPlus responses. Like the written report, this discussion is conducted in an appreciative and strengths-based manner. Additionally, potential pathways for further professional development can be explored. The assessors, who are all experienced adult educators themselves, can also offer tailored advice and practical recommendations upon request (Strauch et al., 2020).

Once this final step is completed, candidates receive the finalized GRETA competence balance, signed by the assessor, along with a digital badge, which they may choose to integrate into their social media profiles or email signatures.

3.3 *Relationships between the PortfolioPlus Procedure and Resilience Factors*

In the following section, we will use the four resilience factors identified above to analyze the extent to which the competence validation process itself has the

potential to enhance teachers' resilience. To support our discussion, we will present findings from the evaluation of the GRETA process and provide sample questions from the PortfolioPlus. At the same time, we will critically reflect on the limitations of the process in fostering resilience. First, however, we will explain in more detail our empirical basis.

3.3.1 Empirical Basis

In the first two years after the launch of PortfolioPlus (2021–2022), an evaluation was carried out in the form of an online survey. The survey aimed to find out how users viewed aspects such as user experience, the practicality of PortfolioPlus, the functionality of the online system, the clarity and appropriateness of the questions, and the quality of the information and support provided. For the purpose of the present paper, the questions related to the perceived benefits of the PortfolioPlus process for teachers are of particular interest. All adult educators who had completed the PortfolioPlus and undergone the full process were invited to fill in an online questionnaire containing both closed and open-ended questions. Regarding the perceived benefits, the adult educators were asked to rate predefined benefits on a four-point Likert scale. Additionally, they had the opportunity to provide open-ended comments or suggest further benefits they perceived from engaging in the process. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and as an incentive, each respondent received a €10 Amazon voucher upon completion. By the end of the survey period, 204 teachers had participated (n = 204). While the questionnaire remained anonymous, it collected demographic data and information on the respondents' professional backgrounds (e.g., teaching subject).

The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency counts). The open-ended responses were analysed using a qualitative content analysis approach inspired by Mayring's (2010) method.

Now that we have explained the empirical basis, we will continue with the analytical presentation and show which elements of the PortfolioPlus process have a potentially beneficial effect on the four resilience factors mentioned.

3.3.2 Self-efficacy

As self-efficacy is a competence facet within the GRETA model, it is explicitly assessed in PortfolioPlus. One of the questions linked to this competence facet asks teachers to describe a situation in which they successfully overcame a professional challenge:

> Question: Teachers in adult and continuing education face a wide range of demands and expectations, such as integrating digital tools and learning

> platforms, managing diverse learner groups, or working in unstable or unpredictable employment conditions. Please provide an example of how you have dealt with such challenges. In particular, explain how your confidence in your skills and your enjoyment of your work helped you overcome this difficult situation. Write approximately 150 to 200 words. (GRETA PortfolioPlus)

It seems evident that the explicit requirement to describe successful experiences and acknowledge them as such can have a positive impact on users' self-confidence.

The PortfolioPlus is generally designed to encourage deep reflection on teaching practices and competencies, prompting educators to recognize and articulate their skills and experiences. The structured nature of the questionnaire, covering various aspects of teaching competencies, helps participants identify strengths they may have previously overlooked. This self-assessment process alone can enhance confidence in one's abilities, a key component of self-efficacy, as our results indicate: 86.3% of respondents agreed with the statement: "PortfolioPlus has made me more aware of my knowledge and skills" (summary of the answers 'Strongly agree' and 'Tend to agree' on the four-point Likert scale. The same applies to the figures reported further below).

This is particularly significant in the field of adult education, where, unlike in the school sector, there are no structured training pathways into teaching. Many educators enter the profession as career changers or through part-time roles, acquiring their skills informally through learning by doing, online research, or occasional short training courses on specific topics. Comprehensive training in adult education, such as a dedicated degree programme, remains a rarity in Germany. As a result, many teachers have had little opportunity to systematically reflect on their competencies and may not be fully aware of their professional strengths.

Both the GRETA competence balance and the oral feedback from assessors provide teachers with external validation of their skills. This kind of professional recognition is particularly valuable for those without formal pedagogical training. Open-ended responses in the evaluation confirm that completing PortfolioPlus and receiving a GRETA competence balance have contributed to a heightened awareness of one's professional capabilities.

This newfound awareness enhances self-efficacy by aligning self-perception with actual competencies:

- The main benefit for me was the realization that I have more skills than I would have previously attributed to myself.

- The advantage for me was that I recognized myself as having a certain level of pedagogical competence, even though I had no training for it.
- For me, the portfolio has the benefit that I have reflected on my actions as a teacher and thus become aware of my competencies. As I have not completed a degree programme, this is very important to me (PortfolioPlus Evaluation, 2020–2022).

On the other hand, any assessment process carries the risk of disappointment or frustration if the results do not meet expectations. While the PortfolioPlus procedure is not entirely immune to this, measures are in place to mitigate such effects. The graphical representation of competence levels may reveal perceived "gaps" in knowledge and skills, which teachers may initially find discouraging. However, the PortfolioPlus framework actively counteracts such negative reactions. The verbalized assessment in the GRETA competence balance exclusively highlights existing competencies in a strengths-based manner, and the final feedback discussion plays a crucial role in this process. This feedback discussion is conducted by the assessors with the adult educators who have completed the PortfolioPlus at the end of the process. The feedback discussions are always conducted in an appreciative, development-oriented manner. Competence gaps are not framed as deficiencies, but rather contextualized—perhaps the skill in question is not highly relevant to a teacher's specific role—or reframed as opportunities for further professional development.

A key responsibility of assessors in this concluding discussion is to act as facilitators and enablers, reinforcing teachers' achievements, encouraging them in their professional growth, and, where possible, offering concrete suggestions for future development. Evaluation results confirm that increased professional confidence is a frequent outcome of the competence validation process. In fact, 66.2% of respondents agreed with the statement: "PortfolioPlus has given me more self-confidence in my professional skills". Open-ended responses frequently reinforce this sentiment:

- My confidence in my teaching attitude was strengthened, beyond self-confidence, in the sense of being convinced of meaningful didactic principles. This motivates me to further develop my teaching attitude and my teaching behaviour in this direction (even against 'headwinds').
- I can teach more confidently.
- For me, making my competencies clear has boosted my self-confidence.
- The feedback session was very informative and motivating for me! (PortfolioPlus Evaluation, 2020–2022).

3.3.3 Professional Identity

Adult education professionals often grapple with a fragmented professional identity due to the diverse and heterogeneous nature of their field (Zagir & Dorner, 2021).

Several questions in the PortfolioPlus tool address key aspects of professional identity, including motivation and commitment to teaching. Some questions explicitly focus on the teacher's self-concept. One such question asks: "When you think about your role as a teacher in adult and continuing education, which two terms best describe how you perceive yourself?" This is followed by a list of descriptors such as "knowledge mediator", "coach", "counselor", "learning facilitator", "teacher", "trainer", "entertainer", and "adult educator", among others, from which respondents are asked to select two. A subsequent question invites teachers to elaborate on their choices, explaining why these terms resonate with their perception of their role.

Through the deliberate reflection on their professional identity—or key components of it—and the articulation of their thoughts in writing, educators can give greater definition to their identity and enhance their self-awareness.

Moreover, PortfolioPlus can foster a sense of belonging to a broader professional community of adult educators. By referencing the GRETA competence model, which serves as a kind of standard for the adult education sector, PortfolioPlus users gain a heightened awareness of adult education as a distinct and fully recognized professional field. While this occupational domain remains highly diverse and not yet clearly delineated, the existence of such a standard provides it with greater definition, facilitating professional identification.

Evaluation feedback suggests that this effect was explicitly experienced by some users:

- Thank you for this great skills assessment and the really super motivating feedback session. It really helped me enormously and I now simply feel much more at home in my job.
- I now feel much more confident in my role as a teacher (PortfolioPlus Evaluation, 2020–2022).

In an online evaluation, 60.8% of respondents agreed with the statement: "Thanks to the PortfolioPlus process, I identify more strongly as a teacher in adult education". Additionally, 55.4% affirmed: "My satisfaction with my professional role has increased as a result of PortfolioPlus". These findings suggest that the PortfolioPlus procedure contributes, at least to some extent, to the consolidation of professional identity.

3.3.4 Relationships

Adult educators, particularly those working as freelancers or part-time instructors, frequently find themselves in a position of professional solitude, lacking the structured collegial environment typically enjoyed by school teachers. This isolation is compounded by the absence of a prominent, overarching professional association representing adult educators as a unified group, despite the existence of various smaller professional bodies and informal online communities. In this context, the PortfolioPlus process offers some approaches that can potentially counteract the isolation described above.

One of its features is the feedback discussion mentioned above, which provides an opportunity for personalized, peer-to-peer interaction in a field where such exchanges are not commonplace. This dialogue not only provides teachers with insights into their own professional competencies, but can also potentially serve as a bridge to broader professional networks. Assessors, who are themselves experienced practitioners in adult education, can provide advice on existing professional networks and networking opportunities, although the depth and breadth of this advice may vary depending on the individual assessor's knowledge and experience.

Furthermore, PortfolioPlus itself includes elements designed to encourage reflection on professional networking. Specific questions within the portfolio address the use of networking and collegial exchange opportunities, as the following two questions from the PortfolioPlus do:

> Question: Which of the following opportunities for collegial exchange and networking do you use? (This question is followed by a list of options to be ticked such as 'Social media', 'Learning communities', 'Professional associations', 'Conferences, meetings', etc.).
>
> Question: Using a specific example, please describe the extent to which you yourself have initiated networking or collegial collaboration or were responsible for a professional collaboration activity. Please also describe your intentions and the benefits you have derived from your activities.

Even if the users themselves have not yet engaged in such networking, the questions will at least sensitize them to potential benefits and possibly motivate them to get involved.

Compared to the other three resilience factors discussed here, relationships are only addressed to a limited extent in PortfolioPlus. What PortfolioPlus can offer is some initial stimuli and, through the (one-time) feedback discussion, the opportunity for the adult educators to experience a meaningful and

appreciative exchange on equal footing. This, however, cannot compare to engagement in structures such as professional learning communities or professional networks, which are designed for regular and long-term exchange. Such structures, however, are scarcely established in the field of adult education and are particularly inaccessible to the numerically dominant group of freelance educators.

3.3.5 Reflection

Self-reflection plays a central role in the PortfolioPlus process, enabling educators to critically assess and articulate their competencies by responding to questions linked to their teaching practice. Through the structured prompts embedded within PortfolioPlus, educators are encouraged to reflect on multiple dimensions of their professional practice. These include their teaching methods, approaches to conflict resolution and other challenges, their role as educators, and their strategies for motivating learners. Fundamentally, these questions require educators not merely to make general statements, but to substantiate their claimed attitudes, strategies, and perspectives with concrete examples from their own practice.

Such reflective practice has a well-documented effect in enhancing resilience, as it fosters self-awareness, professional growth, and the ability to adapt to challenges (Mezirow, 1991; Schön, 1983). Reflection is most effective when it is not a sporadic exercise, but instead becomes a continuous process of learning from experience. This prevents educators from becoming entrenched in habitual practices that, when viewed from a distance, may prove to be of limited benefit (Bolton, 2010).

The significance of reflection as a factor in continuous personal and professional growth is explicitly highlighted to PortfolioPlus users through a dedicated task. One such prompt asks: "Describe the role reflection plays in your professional practice: What methods do you use? On what occasions (when, how often?) do you reflect, and what benefits do you derive from it?" This question belongs to the competency category "Reflection on one's own teaching practice".

Beyond this meta-reflection, the reflective activities encouraged by PortfolioPlus extend to virtually all aspects of teaching and the broader experience of being an educator. Strong interconnections with other resilience factors discussed here, particularly self-efficacy and professional identity, are clearly evident. For example, educators are prompted to recall and analyze situations in which they successfully demonstrated their competencies. This reflective process reinforces their belief in their ability to effectively manage future challenges. By recalling past successes, educators cultivate a mindset that supports

resilience in future professional situations. Other prompts invite deep introspection into the fundamental motivations and driving forces that shape their teaching practice, as illustrated by the following example question and response.

> Question: What guides your professional actions? For example, is there something particularly important to you in your teaching practice? Or are there things you would never do? Please provide detailed examples to explain the principles and beliefs that shape your professional behavior. Specifically, address each of the following four aspects:
> 1. Your understanding of your role as an educator
> 2. Your views on teaching and learning (in general or in your specific subject area)
> 3. Your general view of humanity
> 4. Your values regarding interactions with people in general and with learners in particular. (GRETA PortfolioPlus)

Here is an example answer given by one PortoflioPlus user to this question:

> Answer: In my work as a lecturer in the security industry, I am guided by a clear understanding of my role: I see myself not only as a provider of knowledge, but also as a supporter and guide. My aim is to prepare participants not only for the exam, but also for the real challenges they will face in their future profession. When teaching, it is particularly important to me that learning is not just a passive absorption of information, but an active process. I encourage discussion and an exchange of experiences, as I am convinced that practical application and reflection can bring the greatest learning success. My approach to people is based on respect and appreciation. Each participant brings individual experiences and strengths that need to be taken into account. Especially in a sensitive area such as safety, it is essential to treat each other responsibly. My values in dealing with people are characterized by fairness and openness. I always endeavor to create an atmosphere in which questions and opinions are welcome, and I expect the same respectful approach from participants. An authoritarian management style would be inappropriate for me; rather, I see us as a team that achieves a goal together. (GRETA PortfolioPlus)

Questions such as these illustrate that completing PortfolioPlus is a demanding and time-intensive endeavor. On average, completing the full

questionnaire takes approximately nine hours, though users can pause and resume their work at any time. Not all users embrace this challenge enthusiastically, yet in retrospect, many recognize the significant value of the required self-reflection. In the evaluation, 79.9% of teachers agreed with the statement: "The reflection process stimulated by PortfolioPlus has contributed to my further development". Additionally, many users highlighted the value of reflection in their free-text comments:

1. The greatest benefit for me was to reflect on my own professional behaviour.
2. The self-reflection stimulated by PortfolioPlus is of great value and benefit.
3. A valuable stimulus to think about my work (PortfolioPlus Evaluation, 2020–2022).

While it can reasonably be assumed, based on existing literature (see Section 2.4), that this well-received reflection also contributes to strengthening users' resilience, this connection was not explicitly addressed in the evaluation. It is plausible that the in-depth self-reflection facilitated by PortfolioPlus enables educators to develop a deeper understanding of their own values, motivations, and behavioural patterns. This, in turn, helps them act with greater awareness and authenticity. By reflecting on their experiences and challenges in everyday professional life, educators can more clearly identify stressors, manage them constructively, and develop targeted coping strategies. This enhances their emotional stability, fosters a positive self-perception, and ultimately supports their ability to remain effective and resilient even in demanding situations. It would be an interesting task for follow-up research to investigate these correlations among PortfolioPlus users in more detail empirically.

4 Conclusion

In this chapter, the links between a (theoretical) model of professional teaching competences of adult educators and elements that promote resilience were analysed, and the (practical) implementation of this model in a competence validation procedure was examined for its resilience-promoting effects on users.

At a conceptual level, strong interconnections between professional competence and resilience have been demonstrated. It was shown that holistically designed competence frameworks extend beyond pedagogical skills to support

overall well-being and adaptability in professional contexts. At the implementation level, the PortfolioPlus competence validation procedure was found to incorporate resilience-enhancing elements such as structured reflection, the recognition of success experiences, and an appreciative, supportive feedback discussion between peers.

Empirical examples as evidences from the PortfolioPlus evaluation underscores its resilience-promoting effects: educators report increased self-confidence, a deeper awareness of their competencies, and greater clarity regarding their professional roles. The structured reflection process, both in written form and in discussions with assessors, emerges as a key mechanism for fostering resilience, enabling adult educators to learn from experience and maintain their motivation. Additionally, the feedback discussion nurtures a sense of belonging through supportive and appreciative dialogue.

While competence validation procedures like PortfolioPlus can provide important support in terms of self-efficacy and professional identity, they cannot fully compensate for the structural insecurities and pressures that undermine educators' ability to remain in the profession long-term. In this sense, resilience must be understood not only as an individual capacity, but also as a systemic issue. Strengthening resilience in adult education therefore requires structural improvements in working conditions, policy measures to ensure fair employment, and long-term institutional support for educators. This is all the more important in times when multiple crisis experiences have become the "new normal" for adult educators, adding further strain to their daily work.

However, certain limitations of the empirical data must be acknowledged. As the data originates from an online survey conducted primarily for evaluation purposes, it is not specifically tailored to resilience promotion, nor do the semi-structured questionnaire responses offer the depth that qualitative interviews could achieve. Furthermore, the sample size and composition do not allow for robust quantitative impact assessments. The empirical findings presented in this chapter should therefore be interpreted as indicative of potential or plausible correlations, which require further investigation in future, research. In practice, the GRETA competence model is already being used by train-the-trainer providers who structure and complete their programmes using the model.

Credit Author Statement

The authors are listed in alphabetical order. Both authors contributed equally to the chapter.

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CHAPTER 8

Andragogues' Professional Standardin Ukraine

Political and Educational Vision under Martial Law

Olena Anishchenko and Nataliia Avsheniuk

Abstract

In Ukraine, the rethinking of andragogue professional training is significantly actualized under martial law, due to the increased public demand for professionalisation and standardization of adult education in the face of instability and uncertainty as well as expansion of educational services for different categories of adults and intensification of migration processes; transformation of andragogue roles and functions, caused by inclusion and individualization of education; diversification of values, goals, age and other characteristics of adult learners. In this chapter, the authors emphasise the exceptional importance of developing the professional standard 'Andragogue' against the approval of the draft Law of Ukraine 'On Adult Education'; substantiate its role in determining the andragogue professional identity, self-realization, and career growth; introduce the Author's draft for the professional standard 'Andragogue'; describe its structure and content; outline the prospects for implementation in the context of demographic and economic challenges.

Keywords

adult education – andragogue professional standard – andragogue professionalisation – educational and political context – Ukraine

1 Introduction

The research results reflect the Ukrainian educational and political contexts of the professionalisation of teaching staff in the adult education sector. We live in a historical time when contexts (educational, cultural, social, political, economic, etc.) and the reality that offers learning opportunities are changing and evolving. Due to the risks and threats posed by Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, the demand for, and needs for adult education are transforming.

As the growing search for adult education services has increased the search for andragogues, the Chapter focuses on the development and implementation of a professional standard draft for the profession of 'Andragogue' (hereafter—Standard) in the context of the political, educational and other challenges faced by Ukraine as a result of the war. We consider the proposed Standard as a variant of one of the responses to these challenges.

The development of the Standard is based on a competency-based approach, which enabled the identification of the job functions and the list of key competencies, in terms of their significance (or essentiality) for the profession. At the same time, the Chapter is devoted not only to defining the list of general and special competencies, but also to "offer a more holistic approach, and a path forward for how educators can engage in the areas relevant to facilitating adult learning" (Jones, Baran & Cosgrove, 2019). Preliminary discussions about the Standard have been held in the expert community of educators and researchers as part of scientific, practical, and educational initiatives under the Action Plan for 2023–2024 to implement the National Strategy for Creating a Barrier-Free Space in Ukraine until 2030 (Розпорядження Кабінету Міністрів України, 2023). Further refinement of the document, its subsequent approval, and implementation will contribute to the enhancement of andragogical educational practices, the optimization of adult education services, and the improvement of andragogue competence capacity.

2 Political Context of Andragogue's Professional Standard Development in Ukraine

The full-scale war caused by Russia's military aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 has led to destabilization in all spheres of public life. Education, and in particular adult education, has been one of the most vulnerable sectors of society, which has not had time to recover from the global COVID-19 pandemic. The urgent and painful problems in Ukrainian adult education are caused by the changes (socio-political, financial, economic, and communication) due to the active phase of the war. In the context of instability and uncertainty, children and young people are leaving the country on a massive scale. According to various surveys, about 5 million Ukrainians have moved abroad, and the number of students and primary school children among them ranges from 10% to 20%. The complex demographic situation and migration processes caused a trend towards a decrease in the number of children and an increase in the number of middle-aged and older people. At the same time, the thematic range of educational services for representatives of many target

groups of students is expanding. Foremost, we are talking about vulnerable groups, such as war veterans (over 800,000 people) (Міністерство усправах ветеранів України, 2024), internally displaced persons (over 4,294,000 people) (International Organization for Migration, 2024), people with special needs, people of the third age, unemployed (over 118,000 people) (Державний центрзайнятості України, 2024), etc.

The challenge of meeting the economy's labour needs and adapting the employment sector to war conditions is becoming increasingly important over time, as a prolonged war brings significant changes to the functioning of the economic system in general and the labour market in particular. The demand for engineering specialists, skilled workers, etc. is growing (Міністерство економіки України, 2024). Also, due to the full-scale war in Ukraine, many professions that were traditionally considered 'male' are facing an acute shortage of personnel. As a result, women are looking for new professional and educational opportunities. At the same time, it should be recognized that it remains impossible to present a holistic picture of the Ukrainian adult education landscape due to the lack of official statistical reporting in this area. Various organizations collect heterogeneous statistical information separately and without further generalization. This situation can have negative consequences, in particular, for the development of educational policy at the state and regional levels, forecasting the development of adult education, etc.

Against the background of growing demand in the market for educational services for the adult population, there is a shortage of teaching staff working with adult learners. Possible reasons for this phenomenon are the lack of a system of continuous professional training of adult educators, the outflow of teaching staff as the result of external migration processes, leaving the profession due to job loss, insufficient financial support, etc.

Thus, in the context of adapting the education system to new realities in Ukraine, the problems of staffing adult education (professional training and development of andragogue, the introduction of andragogical training for representatives of various pedagogical specialties), as well as the development and implementation of a professional standard for andragogue, are of particular relevance. Adopting the Law of Ukraine 'On Adult Education' could accelerate progress in the area, but this document has the status of a draft so far.

3 Educational Vision of Andragogue's Professional Standard Development in Ukraine

The war has negatively impacted access to education, deepened existing educational inequalities, adversely affected the quality of the educational process

and academic performance, and negatively affected the psycho-emotional state of the stakeholders in educational interaction. Educators and learners have to overcome the challenges of war: forced interruptions in education, transition to distance or blended learning, electricity blackouts, air alerts, etc. Educational institutions suffer human losses—teachers, students, and their families are killed and injured during the fighting and/or Russian occupation. The stakeholders have been placed in different conditions, often in regions away from the fighting or outside Ukraine, and some continue to stay in the temporarily occupied territories. As a result, thousands of learners and educators have been forced to change their place of residence within the country or move abroad. The buildings of Ukrainian educational institutions are being destroyed and damaged daily. As of the end of 2023, 365 schools were destroyed and 3,798 were damaged by shelling (savED, 2024). According to a study by the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (Filipishyna, Padun & Movchan, 2024), one adult education institution was destroyed and three were damaged.

Among other things, formal and non-formal adult education institutions are tasked with ensuring the safety, reliability, and accessibility of education in conditions of instability and uncertainty amidst wartime restrictions and threats. Since February 24, 2022, many educational institutions in Ukraine have suspended offline educational processes. Currently, education in Ukraine is provided offline, online, or in a mixed format. In general, the modes of study are determined by the regional military administrations on the local level, taking into account the security situation. Institutions located in the frontline areas face great difficulties, mainly due to the constant danger of shelling, lack of reliable shelters and electricity blackouts. Distance education has become a real salvation for learners who have remained under occupation, gone abroad, or still live in the frontline areas.

4 Background of Professional Standard Development

Over the past two decades, the majority of economically and socially developed countries have introduced professional standards for adult educators in response to increasing the quality of adult education. Discussions range from understanding the need for them and their content and formats, which tend to be fuelled by the question of how professional standards should be used by those both inside and outside the profession. In Ukraine, at the current stage, the need for better professional training of adult learners and adult educators as well has become more urgent, as the need to improve the range of skills necessary for successful self-realization in the unpredictable and unstable conditions of martial law and post-war reconstruction.

New expectations require updating the competencies of andragogues—adult learners' educators, justifying their selection and creating appropriate conditions for their acquisition. The motivation for personal and professional development needs to be strengthened, primarily by employing a relevant offer of professional development, which is ensured by the gradual growth and establishment of professional self-identification. Since 2019, there have been some positive developments in the legal and conceptual provision of training and professional self-realization of andragogues (Anishchenko, Bazeliuk, Bekh, Berezivska et al., 2021). Thus, the profession of 'Andragogue' was included in the national 'Classifier of Professions' ДК 003: 2010 (Міністерство економічного розвитку і торгівлі України, 2019); Article 24 'Pedagogical and academic staff in the adult education system' was introduced to the draft Law of Ukraine 'On Adult Education' (2020), according to which andragogues in the system of adult education are considered to be equivalent to pedagogical or academic staff.

The next step should be to develop and implement a professional standard for the profession of 'Andragogue'. Considering the above, as well as the scope of the Authors' professional expertise, we have developed such a Standard as part of the participation in the training course 'Development of Professional Standards' initiated by the National Qualifications Agency of Ukraine from December 2020 through March 2021. The Standard was developed in compliance with the provisions of Art. 39 'Professional Standards' of the Law of Ukraine 'On Education' dated September 5, 2017, particularly the definition of a professional standard as "duly approved requirements for the competencies of employees that serve as the basis for the formation of professional qualifications" necessary for the performance of a certain type of professional activity and, for the performance of job functions (Верховна Рада України, 2017). This task has been actualized further in the Action Plan for 2023–2024 for the implementation of the National Strategy for Creating a Barrier-Free Space in Ukraine until 2030 (Розпорядження Кабінету Міністрів України, 2023).

The development of the Standard was based on the following principles: (i) relevance: to what extent the profession meets the current and future needs of the labour market, whether there is demand for it from employers and employees, whether it reflects new technologies and trends in the industry; (ii) consistency: whether the profession is unique and independent, or similar, related to other professions; whether it is part of a larger group of professions; whether it is a component of another professional standard; (iii) availability: whether the resources for drafting a professional standard are available and sufficient, such as expertise, information, time, etc.

Given the conceptual assumption that the content of the Standard certifies the requirements for the content of the professional activity, qualification levels and competencies required by qualified employees, the Authors analysed the market of educational services for the andragogue professional training; studied the adult education regulatory and legal basis; analysed the similar documents in international practice as advanced professional standards serve the basis for international comparability of qualifications (Curriculum globALE, 2021; Informacja o zawodzie. Andragog, 2018; Kutsestandardid, 2017); carried out functional analysis of the andragogue profession, which helped to identify and structure of job functions according to the levels of complexity and responsibility. The Standard was designed following the approved structure and format of the professional standard established by the Procedure (Національне агентство кваліфікацій, 2023).

5 Role and Design of the Standard

The main role of the standard is to become a tool for the implementation of lifelong learning strategy and improvement of adult education and learning quality in Ukraine; an indicator for the selection of andragogues and assessment of their qualifications in formal and non-formal adult education institutions; a basis for the establishment of labour and civil law contracts, etc. The Standard should also become the basis for the development and accreditation of educational programmes in higher education institutions; the creation of advanced training courses for andragogues; self-assessment and planning of their professional development, and further certification.

The Standard describes five areas of activity (job functions) of the andragogue, encompassing several professional competencies, totaling fifteen. Each professional competence involves certain abilities, which are represented through relevant knowledge and skills. The Standard also proposes a list and definition of six general crosscutting competencies, as required by the Recommendations for the development of professional standards approved by the Government of Ukraine (Національне агентство кваліфікацій, 2023).

These include:

1. ability to fulfill the duties and exercise the rights conferred by citizenship, to bear personal responsibility for professional activities, to respect human rights and freedoms and to be aware of civil society values;
2. ability to interact interpersonally and in teams, prevention and resolution of conflict situations;

3. ability to respect and value multiculturalism in society and professional activities;
4. ability to make effective decisions in professional activities, motivating all participants in the educational process to achieve a common goal;
5. ability to adapt to the conditions of the educational environment and to act in non-standard situations, to generate and implement new ideas;
6. ability to self-improvement and self-development, effective management of working time.

All the processes of interaction between andragogues and adult learners are cross-cutting. Their integrity is ensured by the availability of general and professional competencies necessary for the effective performance of all job functions (Table 8.1).

The Standard was designed in two dimensions: (i) the professional identity of the andragogue and (ii) partnership interaction with all stakeholders.

TABLE 8.1 Job functions and professional competencies of an andragogue

Job functions	**Professional competences**
Design and organization of adult education and learning, cultural and leisure activities	Organizational competence Digital competence Cultural and leisure competence
Teaching and counselling in adult education and learning	Methodological competence Psychological competence Evaluative and reflective competence
Partnering with different stakeholders in adult education and learning	Communication competence Prognostic competence Inclusive competence
Organisation and implementation of research in adult education and learning (formal, non-formal, and informal)	Monitoring and diagnostic competence Project competence Research competence Expert competence
Continuous personal and professional development and self-improvement	Ability to lifelong learning; obtaining additional qualifications Ability to design and implement a personalised trajectory of professional development and self-improvement

An andragogue's professional identity is characterised by general competencies and competencies related to personal and professional qualities, knowledge, and growth. Interacting in partnership with the participants of the educational process is described by professional competencies related to the andragogue's ability to communicate with all stakeholders in different situations, and manage the learning and research environment. Drafting the Standard was guided by the understanding that "these competencies constitute a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes adult educators need to carry out their tasks effectively. The complexity of the competencies involved in the learning process, directly and indirectly, highlights the complexity of the role of the adult educator" (Ioannou, 2023).

5.1 *Job Function "Design and Organisation of Adult Education and Learning, Cultural and Leisure Activities"*

In the Standard, the job function of designing and organizing adult education and learning, cultural, and leisure activities involves the andragogue's mastery of organisational, digital, cultural, and leisure competencies.

We interpret *organisational competence* as the ability to organize the process of adult learning in formal and non-formal education institutions; to formulate proposals for determining the list, and content of educational programmes, conditions for their implementation; and promotion of services in the field of formal and non-formal adult education. Having mastered this competence, the andragogue is aware of the education/training cycle and its five phases (needs assessment, programme/curriculum development, planning and organization, implementation/delivery, and evaluation) and understands how these phases are connected in the professional cycle of activity as stated in Curriculum globALE: Competency framework for adult educators (2021). *Digital competence* embodies the ability to navigate the information space, search and critically evaluate information for professional activities, and select and use digital technologies in the educational process. Ochoa-Dąderska et al. emphasise that educators require digital andragogy that is finely attuned to the digital proficiency levels of their diverse students (Digital Competence Map for Adult Education Facilitators, 2023).

Cultural and leisure competence is the ability of an andragogue to organize and carry out cultural and leisure activities for adults at the appropriate communicative, intellectual, emotional, creative and other levels, which makes it possible to independently solve professional problems in this area. As rightly noted in Adult Education Preconditions and Program Standards of the Commission on Teacher Credentialing in California "Teachers facilitate the development of clear expectations for social interaction in the classroom,

understanding the role that culture plays in the learning environment" (Adult Education Preconditions and Program Standards, 2023).

Thus, the performance of the "Design and organization of education, training and cultural and leisure activities of adults" function ensures the effective use of tools for course design and methods that meet the requirements of adult-oriented didactics and are suitable for needs assessment, programme development, planning and organization, as well as evaluation of classes.

5.2 *Job Function "Teaching and Counselling in Adult Education and Learning"*

The Standard describes the job function of teaching and counselling in adult education and learning in terms of methodological, psychological, evaluative, and reflective competencies.

We support European researchers' views on the importance of *teaching and counselling competencies* as "counselling and guidance of adult learners in their learning and development process are related to the professional expertise of the professional who carries out the activity and has to do with the assessment of needs since the professional must be able to advise based on the given the specific, individual situation of the adult learner; … the professional must be able to monitor and evaluate the progress of the learning process" (Buiskool, Broek, van Lakerveld, Zarifis, Osborne, 2010). We interpret *methodological competence* as the ability to select and use effective methods and technologies for teaching adults in formal and non-formal education settings. *Psychological competence* is an andragogue's ability to identify and consider adult learners' age and other individual characteristics in the educational process. By delving into the psychological underpinnings of adult education, we can uncover strategies that make learning more effective and personally relevant for adults (Psychology of Adult Learning and Motivation, 2024). *Evaluative and reflective competence* is the ability of an andragogue to assess and analyze the learning outcomes of adult learners, taking into account the dynamics of their progress. In general, we should bear in mind that evaluation in adult education is a broad issue and should therefore be presented as an overview of the main aspects and issues, with a focus on evaluating the training itself (Curriculum GlobALE, 2021).

This will ensure that an andragogue fulfils the "Teaching and counselling in adult education and learning" function on a high level, guarantee effective implementation of the repertoire of adult learning and education methods and achieve optimum learners' success in the respective target group and given settings.

5.3 *Job Function "Partnering with Different Stakeholders in Adult Learning and Education"*

Networking and partnerships in adult learning and education contribute to the organisational development of educational service providers, shaping the social behaviour of the subjects of educational interaction following the educational needs and demands of both individuals and society as a whole (Kiss, 2020). In the Standard, this job function is emphasized by communicative, prognostic, and inclusive competencies. *Communication competence* is an integral part of the andragogue's professional skills. We interpret it as the ability to communicate constructively with different categories of adults. *Prognostic competence*, as a complex and dynamic professional quality, embodies the andragogue's ability to predict and plan adult learning in formal and non-formal settings, enabling actions aimed at scientifically based forecasting of educational agents' interaction. *Inclusive competence* is the ability to provide a barrier-free educational environment for different categories of adults with a view to their full integration into society and their social and occupational adjustment. Ukrainian adult education, as well as the educational sphere of many other countries (Adult Education and Inclusion, 2023; Kuusipalo et al., 2021), is facing the problem of developing the inclusive competence of andragogues.

Thus, the fulfillment of the "Partnering with different stakeholders in adult learning and education" function ensures teamwork and cohesion, diversity management; constructive interaction of educational actors united by common goals and aspirations at the level of formal and non-formal education institutions; and the effectiveness of cooperation between external and internal stakeholders in general.

5.4 *Job Function "Organisation and Implementation of Research in Adult Education and Learning* (*Formal, Non-formal and Informal*)*"*

The andragogue's research initiatives in adult education and learning emphasise scientifically based issues of theoretical and applied investigations of teaching and learning of the target group. We are inspired by Fejes and Nylander (Fejes & Nylander, 2019) that the research field of adult education and learning is changing over time and is quite diverse in terms of the current choice of theories, research objects, methodology, etc.

We consider *research competence* as the ability to organize and conduct practice-oriented research in the field of formal, non-formal, and informal adult education. The *monitoring and diagnostic competence* embodies the ability to monitor the adults' educational and cultural needs and to assess the

quality of educational, cultural, leisure, and other services provided. In our opinion, the expediency of developing the research, monitoring and diagnostic competencies of an andragogue is in line with the statements of the report "Reimagining our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education" of the International Commission on the Futures of Education on the relevance of implementing research programmes aimed at analyzing the problems associated with the human right to lifelong learning: "Contributions should be welcomed from everyone—with teachers to students, from academics and research centres to governments and civil society organizations" (UNESCO report, 2021, p. 5). *Project competence* is a professionally significant characteristic of his/her personality and activities that contributes to the enrichment of professional experience and growth. The expert and analytical direction is one of the relevant vectors of andragogue's professional activity. It is based on *expert competence* as the ability to carry out methodological, project and other types of expertise in adult education.

Thus, the andragogue's job function "Organisation and implementation of research in adult education and learning (formal, non-formal and informal)" makes it possible to conduct practice-oriented research as a way of gaining knowledge and innovations in their field (Ciraso-Calí, Martínez-Fernández, Reinaldo, París-Mañas, Sánchez-Martí & García-Ravidá, 2022); improving educational practice based on the scientific knowledge gained (Salmento, Murtonen & Kiley, 2021) (based on the results of the diagnosis); monitoring the quality of educational activities through the use of appropriate measurement tools, etc.

5.5 *Job Function "Continuous Personal and Professional Development and Self-improvement"*

Continuous development and self-improvement of andragogues is an integral part of their professionalisation. In the combination of "learning, growing, developing and maturing" (Henschke, 2014), professionalization emphasises the process of andragogue becoming a professional, which includes the development of his/her competencies, the formation of a professional identity as belonging to him/her alone, and at the same time "simultaneously professional identity develops and changes through interaction with the professionalism of other individuals and their professional identity" (Jatkauskienė, 2011, p. 87). It is about the need to take into account the peculiarities of various aspects of the andragogue's activity, specialisation, as well as the social, cognitive and emotional contexts of the sphere of professional self-realisation (Jõgi, Gravani & Zarifis, 2020). The ability to lifelong learning is an integral part of the andragogue's professional competence, and its acquisition enables one to carry out

personal and professional development, and self-improvement. On the other hand*, the ability to develop and implement a personalised trajectory* makes it possible to know, transform and improve oneself and at the same time is a condition for the success of professional self-realisation.

6 Conclusion

In the Standard, we have identified knowledge of the nature and content of personalised professional development and self-improvement programmes among the important ones that an andragogue is expected to possess. Andragogues should also have certain skills to develop and implement personalised trajectories of professional development and self-improvement, namely: to plan and implement personal and professional development and self-improvement as well as to develop and implement personalized programmes of personal and professional self-improvement.

The concept of professional standards for adult educators and its usage in association with a competence-based approach has had a great impact on Ukrainian educational policy and practice, as well as the accompanying academic debate. Trends and ideas from other countries have shaped national policy and practice, as has been historically the case, therefore thorough discussion and implementation of the underlying concepts is needed, both nationally and internationally. The holistic draft of the Standard as a framework document defining the basic requirements for andragogues qualifications requires further monitoring, refinement and improvement.

In particular, shortly the Standard plans to provide for the possibility of employment of disabled professionals based on an analysis of individual barriers, and the possibility of adapting technical, organisational and other conditions of the environment and the workplace to the needs of employment. For example, the information about the profession of 'Andragog' in Poland (Informacja o zawodzie. Andragog [235101], 2018), shows that such possibility is regulated and the basis for the decision to employ a person with any type of disability is the relevant result of an individual consultation with an occupational physician. As far as Ukraine is concerned, this issue has become a matter of national importance, as russia's full-scale war against Ukraine has led to an increase in the number of people with disabilities and exacerbated the issue of inclusion. At the beginning of 2024, just over 16% of people with disabilities in Ukraine were officially employed. This compares with an average of 55% in EU countries (Міністерство соціальної політики України, 2024).

The finalisation of the Standard, followed by public discussion, will help to speed up the document's inclusion in the register of professional standards established by the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine.

Therefore, we believe that educational initiatives for the professional development of adult educators in Ukraine should be based on the national context, taking into account international (Buiskool, Broek, van Lakerveld, Zarifis & Osborne, 2010; Eidoo, 2022) and especially European (Lattke, 2016) experience of professionalisation of this target group and adult education in general. This will contribute to the development of adult education as an important component of lifelong learning, which will improve the adaptability of andragogues and adult learners to changes in the labour market and society as a whole. It is a matter of both advantageous living conditions and a life of instability and insecurity (in particular during times of war).

At the time of this chapter's writing, the war in Ukraine has been going on for ten years in a row. The specifics of the russian federation's activities in the hybrid war, which combines military, quasi-military, diplomatic, informational, and economic means, not even shying away from nuclear blackmail, clearly demonstrate its attempts to achieve its own political goals in Ukraine and other countries, which are not always clear to the international community. The difference between Russia's military actions against Ukraine and those known to modern Europe over the past almost 100 years is the scale of its destructive actions and impact on all spheres of life, including adult education. The proposed Standard as a possibility of one of the responses to economic, demographic, social, and educational challenges in Ukraine plays an important stabilising role not only in the professionalisation of training and development of educators for adult learners, but also in the sustainable functioning of society in conditions of uncertainty. In such extremely difficult conditions, adult education personnel need substantial methodological and regulatory support in developing professional qualifications and full recognition in the labour market which is the purpose of professional standard development and approval. A comparative analysis of the role of professional standards and their impact on the development of professionals in crises caused by military conflict may become a promising area for further research in the field of adult education.

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CHAPTER 9

Professionalisation of Adult Educators in Slovenia in the Face of COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis

Borut Mikulec

Abstract

In the chapter, I discuss the professionalisation of adult educators in Slovenia as a multi-level phenomenon that interconnects macro, meso, and micro levels and analyse how the state, adult education providers, and adult educators have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Theoretically, the chapter builds on professionalisation as a multi-level phenomenon, while methodologically, it is based on the analysis of various relevant formal documents and secondary sources. The chapter findings indicate the shift to organisations and individuals for their continuous professional development, however, with the state still playing an important role in the professional development of adult educators. Nevertheless, during the pandemic, support to cope with distance education came mainly from the organisational level; at the individual level, adult educators recognised digital competence and didactics of distance education as a necessary condition of their professionalism, while at the outbreak of the pandemic, the state reoriented adult education policy towards the 'digitalturn' and the digitalisation of the adult education sector.

Keywords

adult educators – COVID-19 pandemic – professionalisation – Slovenia

1 Introduction

The adult education (AE) research community (e.g., Egetenmeyer et al., 2019; Jarvis & Chadwick, 1991; Nuissl & Lattke, 2008) and international organizations (e.g., DVV International, 2013; Council of the European Union [CEU], 2021; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning [UIL], 2022) emphasise the importance of well-qualified personnel working in AE. However, the question of whether AE should professionalize has been discussed since the 1920s. One

strand is in favour of professionalisation because it may help to improve AE's marginal status in society and its quality; the other has been raising concerns that professionalisation may lead to the marginalization or exclusion of different voices and approaches to AE (Merriam & Brockett, 2007; Grotlüschen et al., 2020; Ioannou, 2023). Furthermore, the range of professionals working in the field of AE is wide and diverse, as AE is linked to a country's social structure, its socio-economic, cultural, and political traditions, and the low regulation of the AE system (Jütte et al., 2011). The field is also characterized by fragmented education opportunities and precarious job status, with many adult educators lacking formal preparation for teaching, counselling, programme planning, and so on before entering the profession (Andersson et al., 2013; Beszédes, 2022). While studies on professionalisation have recently focused primarily on the competences that adult educators should possess (cf. Mikulec, 2019; Zagir & Mandel, 2020), less attention has been paid to the role that the state and different organizations play in the initial and continuing professionalisation of adult educators (Breitschwerdt et al., 2019; Schwarz & Mikulec, 2020; Gravani & Zarifis, 2020; Ioannou, 2023), and also to the career paths, professional identity, and development of adult educators (Bron & Jarvis, 2008; Evans, 2008; Bierema, 2011; Piliri & Gravani, 2023).

Recently, AE organizations and adult educators have also been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. This is due to the dramatic changes in their work environment (e.g., the shift to online learning, the lack of technological resources and knowledge on how to conduct distance education), the loss of their jobs, the fragility and decline of educational provision, the increasing social and digital inequalities among adults, and the rising number of adult learners struggling with various psychological difficulties, among other factors (James & Theriault, 2020; Stanistreet et al., 2020; Milana et al., 2021). Nevertheless, some studies have recently shown that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an 'exogenous shock' (Sabatier & Weible, 2007), the policy agendas have been (re)oriented to respond to new problematisations and to bring about policy change (e.g., Morris et al., 2022; Zancajo et al., 2022; Milana & Mikulec, 2023).

In view of this context, this chapter has two aims. First, to analyze and discuss professionalisation from a multi-level perspective to gain insights into how the interdependencies between state-society (macro level), organizations (meso level), and personnel (micro level) affect the professionalisation of adult educators. We use a multi-level perspective in Slovenia, the European Union (EU) Member State with long tradition in adult education (Milana & Mikulec, 2023) and efforts in professional development of adult educators dating back to the late 1950s when Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia (Mikulec, 2019). Furthermore, unlike many other EU countries, public adult education in Slovenia

is regulated by the law, meaning that adult educators working in formal and non-formal adult education programmes must fulfill certain prescribed professional requirements before entering professional practice (Mikulec, 2019, p. 35). Secondly, to examine how the state and AE providers responded to the existential threats faced by adult educators during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in the years 2020–2022. In line with these two aims, two research questions are investigated: How do the interdependencies between macro, meso, and micro levels affect the professionalisation of adult educators in Slovenia? How did the state, organizations, and adult educators respond to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis? Theoretically, the chapter builds on the understanding of professionalisation as a multi-level phenomenon. The methodological framework represents an analysis of: (1) formal documents (laws, rules, and policies) regulating AE in Slovenia at the macro level; (2) statutes and websites of professional organizations, university study programmes, and programmes for continuing professional development of professionalisation organizations at the meso level; (3) evaluation studies researching adult education during the COVID-19 pandemic at the micro, but also at the macro and meso levels; and (4) secondary data sources.

2 Professionalisation of Adult Educators as a Multi-level Phenomenon

Professionalism is perceived as a quality feature of the AE professionals (Beszédes, 2022). Based on the 'new' professionalism, Egetenmeyer, Breitschwerdt and Lechner (2019, pp. 12–13) propose a multi-level model of professionalisation that should be understood as a mutually dependent relationship between staff-personnel, organizations, and society contexts. Discussing professionalism in AE from a multi-level perspective requires that all three different, but interlinked levels be addressed.

At the macro level of (1) *the state, society, and institutions*, the state defines laws and policies for AE, lifelong learning (LLL), the labour market, and umbrella associations in the field. However, AE is most often also systematically unregulated and marginalized (e.g., Bierema, 2011; Jütte & Latke, 2014), and the responsibility for AE governance is distributed among different ministries, bodies, and stakeholders (Desjardins, 2017).

At the meso level, (2) AE *organizations* are responsible for quality management, programme planning, learning cultures, and professional development through initial or continuing formal and non-formal education programmes. However, there is a variety of organizations (providers) active in this field, as

organized forms of learning take place in AE institutions (centres, folk schools), companies, museums, libraries, non-governmental organizations, health care institutions, trade unions, schools, colleges, and universities, among others (cf. Jütte et al., 2011; Jõgi et al., 2020). According to Merriam and Brockett (2007, pp. 106–107), these organizations can be divided into four main types: (a) independent AE organizations whose primary mission is to provide learning opportunities for adults; (b) educational institutions whose primary mission is to serve youth, but may also serve adults (e.g., community colleges); (c) quasi-educational organizations that see education as a secondary function to their primary mission (e.g., libraries, museums); and (d) non-educational organizations that see education as a means to other ends (e.g., businesses, unions, correctional institutions).

At the micro level, (3) *professionals and adult learners* and their teaching-learning process form the centre of professionalism. However, adult educators take on different roles in their work that go beyond the teaching-learning nexus. For example, Nuissl (2010, pp. 130–132) has identified six main activities that adult educators perform and that can be found in European countries: (a) teaching, which is the classical activity of adult educators; (b) management, which deals with quality management, human resource development, educational marketing, fundraising, project management; (c) guidance and counselling, which supports learners in finding suitable offers, analyzing their learning needs and recognizing prior learning; (d) media use, which is related to the production and use of educational software for adults, learning opportunities with interactive media and the Internet; (e) programme planning, which includes the planning of an offer by an educational institution, companies or local authorities; and (f) support, which includes the technical, administrative or organisational support of AE.

Furthermore, the 'new' professionalism also understands professionalism as mediating between three ideal-typical logics. *Professionalism*, which emphasizes the autonomy of adult educational expertise in action'. *Bureaucracy*, that is related to 'requirements and processes of standardization and hierarchization introduced by public authorities' (i.e., requirements for quality management in AE organizations). *Economics*, which emphasizes the logic of the market (i.e., supply and demand in a profit-orientated AE market) (Breitschwerdt & Egetenmeyer, 2023, p. 63). Therefore, professional adult educators should be able to mediate between all three perspectives in their practice.

Having said this, we now turn into a discussion and analysis of professionalism in AE in Slovenia by addressing the different levels identified. First, the macro level is addressed, in which state-society context and its response to the COVID-19 pandemic are analysed. Second, the meso level and response of the

organizations to the COVID-19 pandemic are addressed. Third, staff-personnel and their response to the COVID-19 pandemic is analysed at the micro level.

3 Professionalisation of Adult Educators in Slovenia: Macro, Meso, and Micro Levels

From a historical perspective, the professional development of adult educators in Slovenia can be traced back to the late 1950s, when Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia (Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia until June 25, 1991, when it declared its independence). The systematic training of adult educators was first introduced at the People's and Workers' Universities (1957–1959) through conferences, lectures, workshops, and summer/winter schools. In the 1960s and 1970s, Yugoslav universities opened the door to systematic theoretical and empirical research in AE and introduced study programmes on 'andragogy' (adult education) at the faculties of Arts/Philosophy. Due to the favorable social climate, a new profession called 'andragogue' (adult educator) emerged. The Yugoslav (and thus the Slovenian) experience demonstrated the interdependence between andragogy as a science and the andragogue as a professional; those working in AE must acquire a certain amount of academic andragogical knowledge (see Mikulec, 2019, pp. 33–34).

3.1 *State-Society Context*

After independence, Slovenia reformed its entire education system, including AE; new measures were introduced to promote the development of adult education through the granting of special funds, the establishment of specialized bodies (e.g., the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education [SIAE]) and the development of an AE national programme. AE governance is managed at the state level, with state actors playing an important role in the political decision-making process. The ministries responsible for education and labour are the two main ministries responsible for the AE governance, but they are also supported by other ministries and professional bodies (see Mikulec, 2021, p. 43; Mikulec, 2024). Several laws (school and employment acts) regulate AE, while the special Adult Education Act (2018) regulates non-formal education and defines the public interest established by the *Resolution on the Master Plan for Adult Education in the Republic of Slovenia* (hereinafter AEMP). So far, three AEMPs have been adopted by the National Assembly: the first covered the period 2004–2010, the second the period 2013–2020, and the third, currently in force, the period 2022–2030.

To address state-society context, we analysed four policies and legislation that shape professionalisation of AE at the national level: (a) *White Paper on*

Education in the Republic of Slovenia (2011) (hereinafter White Paper), (b) *Adult Education Act* (2018), (c) *Resolution on the Master Plan for Adult Education in the Republic of Slovenia for the period 2022–2030* (AEMP, 2022), and (e) *Rules on the selection and co-funding of programmes of continuous professional education and development of education staff* (2017) (hereinafter Rules).

The educational requirements for AE professionals, these being defined as teachers, organizers, counselors, and 'other professionals', working in formal educational programmes (e.g., basic schools for adults, general or vocational upper secondary education programmes) and publicly recognized non-formal educational programmes for adults are regulated by the Adult Education Act (2018). The conditions that adult educators must fulfill are: (a) proficiency in the Slovenian language; (b) education acquired through master's degree programmes; (c) pedagogical-andragogical education (this includes knowledge of pedagogy, psychology, andragogy/AE, general didactics, subject didactics, and pedagogical or andragogical/AE practice); (d) successful completion of a professional examination in the field of education.

The need for professionally trained staff is also recognized in education policy. The White Paper (2011) emphasizes the need to: (a) establish a system for high-quality initial training of adult educators, as well as a system for continuing education and training based on the actual needs of adult educators; (b) train a sufficient number of professionals for different target groups and needs; (c) maintain a database of adult educators for public service in AE; and (d) provide high-quality teaching materials, learning resources, and ICT support. Moreover, the AEMP (2022) aims to: (i) develop and implement basic and further training programmes for 'adult education professionals' and 'educators'; (ii) develop new approaches and methodologies; (iii) develop didactics for the use of new technologies and distance education; (iv) develop learning environments for the delivery of distance education programmes (e.g., online classrooms); (v) develop high-quality learning materials and learning resources; (vi) provide ICT support; and (vii) establish a monitoring system for adult educators' participation in basic and further training programmes.

Furthermore, the Rules (2017) support in-service training and career development programs for adult educators, thus ensuring continuous and stable funding of continuing education and training programmes for adult educators.

However, although the state-society context supports the professionalisation of adult educators through its policy measures, it also has some serious blind spots as it excludes some adult educators from being 'professionals'. The Adult Education Act (2018) and the new AEMP (2022) introduced a distinction between 'AE professionals' and 'educators', which leads to unequal treatment of professionals working in formal and non-formal AE programmes. Similarly,

the Rules (2017) do not address all adult educators working in practice equally: teachers, organizers, and counselors are considered 'professionals' and are entitled to participate in professional training programmes, while other adult educators working in practice (e.g., cultural mediators, mentors in study circles, mentors in self-study centres) are not.

3.1.1 Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

At a macro level, the AEMP (2022) was the only policy developed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore took 'into account the importance of building resilience to such and similar social and economic challenges', with opening up 'opportunities to increase learning and educational activities' with the use of 'modern communication technology in adult education' (p. 2). Due to the technological and societal developments in the wake of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the AEMP (2022) calls for: introduction of innovative approaches and methods in AE supported by modern technology; development of open educational resources and mass open online programmes; development of learning environments for the delivery of distance training programmes (e.g., online classrooms, online platforms); development of didactic and methodological adaptations for the use of digital technologies for distance education by adult educators and the delivery of these distance education programmes; provision of appropriate ICT equipment, learning tools and infrastructure for distance education.

Nevertheless, as the data from two national evaluations of AE during the COVID-19 pandemic—the first included 299 professionals (Možina et al., 2020), and the second 185 professionals, as well as 248 participants (Možina, 2021), working in the field of AE—show, during the first wave of the pandemic adult educators were on their own without support at the national level and had to find their own way, relying only on their colleagues in their own teams and on their colleagues in other organizations. In addition, a large part of AE was not included in the systemic measures that the state was implementing in the field of child and youth education. Some solutions have been found for AE, especially for folk schools and upper-secondary schools that provide formal education (e.g., access to tools that enable remote work), but they have been unsystematic and far from meeting the needs of AE during a pandemic. Moreover, no solution was found to provide ICT technology (e.g., Zoom licenses) available to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide non-formal adult education in the public interest (e.g., Slovenian University for the Third Age). During the pandemic, adult educators did not feel addressed by the decision-making level and were not adequately supported by this level.

3.2 *Organisations*

Based on our previous research on the role of organizations in the professionalisation of AE (Schwarz & Mikulec, 2020), we can distinguish between *professionalization organizations* that offer (1) primary professional education and (2) continuing professional development and *professional organizations*, that is, associations self-organized by professionals from the field of AE.

The main *professionalization organization* offering primary education for adult educators in Slovenia is the university, while continuing professional development of adult educators is offered by the SIAE.

The University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, offers doctoral and master's degree programmes in 'Andragogy'. The University of Primorska, Faculty of Education, offers a master's degree programme in 'Adult Education and Career Development'. AE as a subject can also be studied as part of the first- and second-degree study programme of 'Pedagogy' at the University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts, as well as in some other degree programmes (e.g., Organisation and Management, Human Resources). Broadly speaking, master's programmes in andragogy/AE provide students with interdisciplinary (generic) competences in the humanities and social sciences, as well as with professional (subject-specific) competences that enable them to understand the relationships between various AE phenomena and processes, the social and cultural environment, and the characteristics and expectations of individual adults (Schwarz & Mikulec, 2020, pp. 23–24).

SIAE is the main institution responsible for the national system for continuing education and training of adult educators. SIAE has developed two main types of competence-based professional training programmes: (a) general basic and continuing training of adult educators (knowledge of the discipline, andragogical cycle) and (b) basic training on the specific roles of adult educators (e.g., head and mentor in study circles, counselor in adult education guidance centres). For the first type, 37 different programmes were developed lasting from 8 to 24 hours, and for the second type, 21 programs lasting from 8 to 175 hours (ACS, 2024). Table 9.1 shows the number of adult educators who have participated in these programmes over the last 10 years.

The main *professional organizations* we have identified are the following: (i) Andragogical Society of Slovenia (ADS), (ii) Association of Folk Schools of Slovenia (ZLUS), (iii) Slovenian Third Age University (SUTŽO), (iv) Association of Adult Education Organisations in Upper-Secondary Schools (DOIO), (v) Association of Educational and Counselling Centres of Slovenia (ZiSS) (for a more detailed presentation of each organization, see Schwarz & Mikulec, 2020, pp. 21–23). The diversity of these organizations reveals that there is no single

TABLE 9.1 Number of participants who have participated in SIAE professional training programmes for adult educators

Year	Number of participants
2011	745
2012	1056
2013	1014
2014	1092
2015	733
2016	872
2017	891
2018	864
2019	869
2020	997
2021	1111
2022	1333

SOURCE: IZOACS APP.

professional association in Slovenia, but a multitude of associations that serve different goals and needs of their members. The associations are linked to the same types of organizations (e.g., folk schools, universities for the third age), provide training accessible to a smaller number of members, and represent their specific interests at the national level. Overall, the organizations provide some form of non-formal education and/or training of adult educators for the specific tasks they perform, for example: training of adult educators working with adults with special needs, migrants, and prisoners; and mentoring of elderly.

3.2.1 Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Data from two national evaluations of AE during the COVID-19 pandemic (Možina et al., 2020; Možina, 2021) show four important trends. First, the majority of organizations—the first evaluation included 34 folk schools, 70 upper-secondary vocational and technical schools, and 52 universities for the third age (Možina et al., 2020), and the second 34 folk schools, 81 upper-secondary vocational and technical schools, and 52 universities for the third age (Možina, 2021) provided distance education for formal education programmes (e.g., adult basic education, formal vocational and technical education), while

a significant part of non-formal AE came to a standstill during the pandemic. Secondly, the ability and willingness of the different organizations to come together and help each other with advice and experience was noted, especially in the case of folk schools, which have made good use of the opportunities offered by their associations (i.e., ZLUS and ZiSS), meaning that professional associations have played a very important role during the pandemic. Thirdly, the organizations prepared short trainings for teachers and mentors on how to use the collected online distance education tools (e.g., Moodle, Zoom), as well as written technical instructions on how to use the selected online tools. Fourth, during the pandemic, SIAE prepared various programmes for adult educators to build their ICT competences (e.g., working with Zoom and MS Teams video conferencing systems, using Moodle online classrooms), and about one third of all participants who attended SIAE professional training programmes in 2020 and 2021 (see Table 9.1) were involved in these programmes.

3.3 *Staff-Personnel*

As evident from macro and meso level, adult educators in Slovenia can develop their professional competences in different ways, e.g., through formal university study programmes, the system offered by SIAE, non-formal education programmes offered by professional organizations, or other available activities (e.g., participating in Erasmus+ mobility programmes). As our recent study (Mikulec & Kovšca, 2023) shows, adult educators in Slovenia believe that they have enough opportunities for their professional development and that these opportunities depend on their own motivation and the incentives offered by their employers.

However, studies exploring the professional identity of adult educators in Slovenia (e.g., Možina, 2011, 2018; Mikulec & Kovšca, 2023) show that the career paths of adult educators are very diverse. Some have a master's degree in andragogy/AE or have entered the field through formal 'pedagogical-andragogical education' provided by universities. Others have acquired their knowledge about AE through short training courses within the organization they are employed in or work with. In many cases, entry into AE is not a deliberate decision of the individual, but rather a coincidence due to various reasons. The extent to which adult educators focus on their professional development depends on their personal characteristics, interests, needs, initiative, and the circumstances in which they find themselves. Particular attention is paid to professional development by those adult educators who are primarily active in the field (i.e., work in 'independent AE organization' or 'educational institution' according to the classification of Merriam and Brockett [2007]), and less so by those for whom AE is an additional or complementary activity.

Two recent studies (Lemut et al., 2022; Radovan et al., 2022), which analysed the educational needs of adult educators working in non-formal AE programmes from both Slovenian cohesion regions—the study from the Western region included 569 respondents and the study from the Eastern region included 655 respondents coming from public and private AE organizations, associations, and societies—show that adult educators most often lack knowledge about the identification of educational needs and the planning and organization of education, as well as knowledge about andragogy/AE (e.g., andragogical didactics, use of modern teaching methods, working with different vulnerable groups of adults).

3.3.1 Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Data from evaluations of AE during the COVID-19 pandemic (Možina et al., 2020; Možina, 2021) show how the pandemic has further worsened the already unstable working conditions of some adult educators working in different types of organizations. While teachers, mentors, and tutors in the folk schools are mostly freelance, in upper-secondary technical schools some of them perform AE as part of their regular work obligations, while others also do it in various forms of additional contract work. This means that teachers, mentors, and tutors do not feel part of the AE collective and only undertake tasks that are directly related to the teaching of the subject or topic they have taken on. They are also perceived in the collectives as external collaborators with limited powers and responsibilities. Consequently, during the first wave of the pandemic, teachers, mentors, or tutors reported that they were professionally isolated and left to their own to decide how to prepare their subject or topic for distance education, what learning resources, and tools to prepare, how to engage with learners and maintain their motivation, and how to assess their knowledge. Most of them also lacked the knowledge to conduct distance education, were not sufficiently ICT trained, and did not have adequate technical equipment. However, during the second and third waves of the pandemic, teachers, mentors, and tutors reported that they received the most support and help from the AE organizers (AE professionals regularly employed by the main independent AE organizations), from the distance education guidelines produced by the organization, and from the mutual support of teachers and mentors.

Nevertheless, the results (Možina et al., 2020; Možina, 2021) also show that adult educators have learnt about the many benefits of distance education during the pandemic—e.g., higher participation and better accessibility of education to adults, better flexibility of education in terms of time and space, use of new didactic methods, better ICT competences of staff, and technical equipment of organizations for distance education—and intend to keep it in

many organizations in the future, at least in a combined form with face-to-face education (e.g., blended learning). While adult educators learnt and gained ICT competences during the pandemic, their knowledge of distance education didactics needs to be strengthened in the future.

4 Discussion

This chapter explored two aims. Firstly, to analyze and discuss the professionalisation of adult educators in Slovenia as a multi-level phenomenon that interconnects macro, meso, and micro levels (cf. Jõgi et al., 2020). Secondly, to understand how the state, AE organizations, and adult educators in Slovenia have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, as AE organizations and adult educators in Europe and worldwide have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic due to the dramatic changes in their work environment (James & Theriault, 2020; Milana et al., 2021). In doing so, we have also acknowledged that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an 'exogenous shock' (Sabatier & Weible, 2007), the policy agendas of nation states and international organizations have been (re)oriented to respond to new problematisations of the future of education and bring about policy change (Morris et al., 2022; Zancajo et al., 2022; Milana & Mikulec, 2023). Based on our analysis and the data discussed in this chapter, we can present the following findings.

At the macro level, Slovenian policies regulate AE in the public interest, i.e., formal AE programmes and non-formal education programmes that are publicly recognized, where the need for professional competence of adult educators is defined by conditions that adult educators working in publicly recognized AE programmes must meet. The state also regulates the selection and (co-)financing of programmes that promote the professional development of adult educators and in this way contribute to the quality of their work (cf. Egetenmeyer & Käpplinger, 2011). These regulations at the state level can be understood as 'tendencies to professionalize the field' (Bron & Jarvis, 2008, p. 41). However, what is at odds with the international commitments made by the state as a signatory of the *Marrakesh Framework for Action*, regarding the need to 'further professionalize and specialize adult educators' (UIL, 2022, p. 7), is the characterization and exclusion of those who count as professionals in the field of AE. In this way, some profiles of adult educators working in practice (e.g., in non-formal education) are not recognized in policies, which means that they are not eligible to participate in co-financed programmes of professional development organized by the state. Furthermore, the state also does not regulate AE that is not of 'public interest', such as, for example, areas of

AE in companies (e.g., human resources departments) or non-governmental organizations (cf. Lattke & Nuissl, 2008, pp. 11–12).

The state responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in two ways. During the pandemic, the state (the ministry responsible for education) did not systematically support the AE sector, unlike in the case of child and youth education, and adult educators did not feel addressed by the decision-making level. In particular, non-formal education, also the one in the public interest, was completely neglected, a trend that can be observed worldwide (Stanistreet et al., 2020, p. 628). This unequal attitude of decision-makers towards AE in Slovenia is symptomatic when it comes to designing the necessary systemic measures, and the pandemic has only exacerbated this trend (Možina, 2021). On the other hand, it is also clear that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has reoriented AE policy (AEMP, 2022; cf. Milana & Mikulec, 2023) towards 'digitalturn' and digitalization of the AE sector, a trend that can also be observed worldwide (e.g., Käpplinger & Lichte, 2020; Zancajo et al., 2022; Popović & Nišavić, 2023; Cort & Larson, 2024), in terms of online educational offer, appropriate ICT equipment, learning tools, and digital infrastructure, as well as trained adult educators to deliver distance education using digital technologies.

At the meso level, there is no single umbrella professional organization for AE, but a multitude of associations that pursue different goals and needs of their members. There are several higher education institutions that offer AE study programmes and subjects, as well as programmes of pedagogical-andragogical education that provide students with AE knowledge and competences, thus enabling the development of professionalism through formal academic educational pathways. However, studying AE is, as elsewhere (cf. Lattke & Nuissl, 2008, p. 12), not a prerequisite for entering the labour market in Slovenia. Overall, the diversity of organizations creates many opportunities for the professional development of adult educators, but different interest groups gathered in associations can also come into conflict when pursuing their interests at a national level, lacking a common vision of AE. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when systemic support at the national level was lacking, professional associations played a key role by responding quickly to the needs of AE practitioners. However, the organizations were unable to secure the majority of non-formal AE programmes that were not delivered during the pandemic—a concern that was also expressed by the wider AE community (cf. Käpplinger & Lichte, 2020, p. 783; Klimkina et al., 2023, p. 28).

At the micro level, unlike in many other European countries (Ioannou, 2023, p. 383), adult educators in Slovenia can benefit from the existing opportunities for acquiring organized knowledge about AE through formal university study programmes and the system for continuing education and training of adult

educators offered by SIAE, while they can also strengthen their professional competences through non-formal education programmes offered by professional organizations. Despite these opportunities, the career paths of adult educators in Slovenia are still very diverse, and adult educators do not develop a fixed professional identity, but rather a coexistence of different professional identities as in other European countries (Bron & Jarvis, 2008, p. 40; Bierema, 2011, p. 28). The COVID-19 pandemic has further worsened the already unstable working conditions of adult educators working in different types of organizations, a trend that can also be observed in Cyprus (cf. Piliri & Gravani, 2023, p. 158), especially among those working outside AE as a public service, while most adult educators also lacked the knowledge to deliver distance education and did not have adequate technical equipment as in other countries (cf. Stanistreet et al., 2020, p. 628). However, the adult education literature also recognizes that crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can lead 'to new understandings of expertise and knowledge' (Olesen et al., 2021, p. 247) and provide a 'window of opportunity' (Cort & Larson, 2024, p. 116) that leads to change. In this sense, adult educators in Slovenia have learned and acquired new knowledge (i.e., ICT competences) to deal with the digitalization of the AE sector—as can be observed among adult educators in Austria, Canada and Hungary (cf. Klimkina et al., 2023, p. 26)—which has also influenced their perception of professionalism. Moreover, they believe in certain benefits of distance education, and are going to combine it with face-to-face education in the future, while also recognising the need to strengthen their distance education didactics due to the digitalisation of AE.

To summarise. We believe that our findings may be of interest to a wider international community as they indicate that: (a) professionalisation of adult educators is not only a matter of competences that adult educators should possess, but rather a multi-level phenomenon that requires established relationships between staff-personnel, organisations and society contexts; (b) the state can support the professional development of adult educators through its policies and that systematic support from the state is crucial in times of crisis, even if this support is linked to new problematisations brought about by the crisis (i.e., in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, towards the digitalisation of the AE sector); (c) organisations create many opportunities for the professional development of adult educators and that in times of crisis, the role of professional associations is crucial to respond to the needs and challenges faced by adult educators; (d) although a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, worsens the already unstable working conditions of adult educators, the crisis also contains the potential for change among adult educators as they acquire new knowledge to cope with new social and working demands (i.e., ICT competences to deliver distance education or blended learning).

5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed the professionalisation of adult educators as a multi-level phenomenon and shown how the existing macro- and meso-level frameworks in Slovenia facilitate or hinder the possibilities of adult educators (at micro-level) to acquire organised knowledge about AE. While in line with the 'new' professionalism we have noted the shift to organizations and individuals for their continuous professional development, we also acknowledge that in Slovenia, a state with a strong centralized governance, the state with its regulations still plays an important role in the professional development of adult educators. We have also shown how the state, AE providers, and adult educators have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and argued that the pandemic has challenged AE providers and adult educators in Slovenia and worldwide in many ways. During the pandemic, support to cope with distance education in Slovenia came mainly from the organisational level; at the individual level, adult educators recognized ICT competence and didactics of distance education as a necessary condition for their professionalism, while at the outbreak of the pandemic, the state reoriented AE policy towards the 'digital turn' and the digitalization of the AE sector. This shows that crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have the potential to reorient the AE policy agenda and perceptions of professionalism among adult educators.

Today, after the COVID-19 pandemic, two trends caused by the pandemic can be observed. First, while AE organizations have not completely replaced face-to-face education with distance education, most organizations now offer their programmes as blended learning (partly in-person at the organization's premises and partly in an online learning environment). Secondly, according to the Labour Force Survey, the increased use of distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on changes in adult participation in LLL. While the participation rate reached its lowest point in 2020 at 8.4%, it jumped during the pandemic years to 18.9% in 2021 and 21.6% in 2022 and remained high and stable in the years after the pandemic (e.g., 19.9% in 2023). This suggests that the shift to distance education and/or blended learning has also enabled greater adult participation in LLL.

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CHAPTER 10

Professionalisation in Times of Crisis

Supporting Qualifying Adult Educators in Their Higher Education Studies

Maria Brown

Abstract

This chapter reports case study research findings on higher education course curriculum and practices that impact the professionalisation of (prospective) adult educators, particularly in a (post)-COVID-19 crisis context. Grounded in critical education and learner-centred education scholarship, the analysis problematised secondary data concerning part-time students reading for the Bachelor's (Honours) Degree in Adult Education, Training, and Development at the University of Malta. Course alignment to professional and personal aspirations, flexibility, and decision-making opportunities on resources, lecture modalities, time frames etc. featured among the drivers of sustainable professionalisation. Health and family problems and pressures from full-time employment hindered or stalled studies. Findings position (prospective) adult educators as catalysts to reforming the status of adult educators and trainers, and of emancipatory change in the culture of adult and lifelong education in a (post-) COVID-19 context. Nonetheless, this was found to be contingent on higher education institutional learning, warranting of adult educators and trainers, improvements in working conditions and work-life balance.

Keywords

blended and hybrid courses – higher education dropout – learner-centred education – part-time study – professional development – warranting

1 Introduction

1.1 *Rationale, Aims and Scope*

This chapter is an invitation to critically reflect on the use of learner-centred education strategies and methods in the professionalisation of (prospective) adult educators, particularly when this involves part-time evening and hybrid

studies in higher education (HE) contexts in times of crises. The discussion draws on emancipatory learner-centred education (ELCE) in diverse European contexts (Gravani et al., 2023; Borg, 2021; Schweisfurth, 2013) in the analysis of case study data concerning part-time evening HE students of the University of Malta (UM, Malta) reading for a BA (Hons.) Degree in Adult Education, Training and Development (BA AETD) in a (post-)COVID-19 crisis context.

1.2 *Background*

Key global frameworks, such as the United Nation's (UN's) *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (UN, 2015) and sustainable development goal [SDG] 4 Quality Education, guide adult education (AE) and the professional development (PD) of educators. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) *CONFINTEA VI Belém Framework for Action* (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning [UIL], 2010) and the *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education* (UNESCO, 2015), emphasize the professionalisation of adult educators.

Literature on adult students in part-time HE flags challenges related to maintaining work-life balance and progressing with studies (Ramalho, Correia, & Mesquita, 2007). Finding a balance between "living, learning, and earning … can lead to higher attrition rates due to … part-time enrolment status" (Faralli-Semerad, 2019, p. iv). Broader research with adult students in Cyprus pursuing evening studies to complete their high-school degree ('Esperino') flagged absenteeism and drop-out caused by the inability of adult students to cope with simultaneously being parents, employees, and students (Damianidou, 2020). However, attitudes to and experiences of learning of mature, adult students in HE are under-researched, as is the teaching counterpart of this context.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional adult educators' PD, accelerating the shift to online learning, which posed challenges for many educators (Boeren, Roumell & Roessger, 2021, Organisation for Economic and Social Development [OECD], 2020). However, the crisis also prompted further investment in online PD and micro-credentials. In this context, the study informing this chapter asked:

1. Which practices foster students' sustainable participation in the part-time evening course leading to a BA (Hons.) Degree in Adult Education, Training and Development?
2. To what extent and in which way(s) are these practices supporting the professionalisation of (prospective) adult educators, particularly in times of the (post-)COVID-19 crisis?

The chapter's discussion draws on the findings of analysis of secondary data, particularly qualitative data concerning the part-time, evening, hybrid BA

AETD course (2022–2025 cycle, being this the only iteration of the course up to the time of writing). Datasets' timeframes coincide with Malta's (post-)COVID-19 context, with the view that the COVID-19 experience, related restrictions, changes and adaptations qualify the period under study as a time of crisis.

1.3 *Context*

Adult educators in Malta, and their professionalization. During the twentieth century, AE providers tended to be affiliated to the Catholic Archdiocese, trade unions, or the main political parties, because social development informed by Catholic teachings, Christian Democratic or Labour ideologies motivated the bulk of AE initiatives (Borg, Mayo & Raykov, 2016; Mayo, 2012; Mayo, 2007; Caruana & Mayo, 2002; Caruana, 2004). This could well be at the root of the deficit in the recognition of the profession of the adult educator in Malta; and responsible (at least in part) for the Cinderella-legacy of the practice documented in the local literature (e.g., Brown, 2020; Mayo, Pace & Zammit, 2010). Indeed, internationally, the roots of AE in social movements and community activism have been identified as a main barrier to the professionalisation of adult educators (Merriam, Bierema & Brockett, 2019).

Malta's first *National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020* (Ministry of Education and Employment [MEDE], 2016) spelled out the setting up of a department of AE at the UM (Programme 12, p. 54). Today, the Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education (DAOCAE) of the UM runs the BA AETD, among other AE micro-credentials, Diploma and Degree programmes. The same Strategy mandated the "improvement in the professionalism and competencies of teachers in adult education" (p. 30); whilsta further strategic measure mandated the "a framework for professional recognition" (p. 30). More recently, the *National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2023–2030* (Ministry for Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation [MEYR], 2023) mandates the professionalisation of adult educators. However, it is more cautious when it comes to warranting matters, stating that the development implementation of "a system that formally recognizes adult educators" should be an "explore(d) … possibility" (Ministry for Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation [MEYR] 2023, p. 23).

(Post-)COVID-19 crisis impacts on adult educators' PD in Malta: Research revealed a small range of AE and adult educators' PD initiatives since 2020, e.g., short, accredited courses for persons not in education, employment or training (NEETS) (jobsplus, 2023, p. 33). The Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability's (DRLLE, MEYR, which is the national policy maker and state AE provider) found "the necessary impetus to venture into e-learning" (Vassallo et al., 2021, p. 290) with institutional learning gains (p. 290), e.g., peer-to-peer mentoring amongst adult educators, PD initiatives for staff and educators, the opening of a student and educator hub to access digital infrastructure (p. 291).

Meanwhile, the DAOCAE has been involved in the revamping and delivery of the programme qualifying and professionally developing adult educators and trainers practicing non-formal and non-formal AE settings, also by establishing partnerships with entities that include the Active Ageing and Community Care Agency, the Academy for the Disciplined Forces, and the Office of the Commission for Older Persons.

The BA AETD Programme of Studies and Course is a three-year part-time evening hybrid programme and, as to the time of writing, the only programme offered by a Malta-based institution that qualifies at EQF Level 6 Degree level (L-Università ta' Malta, n.d.-b). Albeit not a requirement for recruitment as an adult educator with state or other licensed providers of AE or training, this qualification is an asset to the enacting the professionalisation mandate of the *National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2023–2030* (MEYR, 2023). The BA AETD programme features a competence-driven curriculum that targets the attainment of learning outcomes in the areas of curriculum, evaluation, and quality assurance, cognitive neuroscience and psychology of adult learning, multiple literacies (basic literacy, digital literacy, health literacy, financial literacy), community- and arts-based education with adults, methodology and research methods, a placement and a dissertation (L-Università ta' Malta, n.d.-b).

2 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Building on how critical pedagogies been found to motivate and engage HE students with problematising contexts and dynamics (Kadi-Hanifi, 2009), the conceptual framework of the study unpacked seminal concepts such as 'conscientization' and 'problematisation' (Freire, 2005) using Schweisfurth's (2013) four dimensions of learner-centred education (*a–d below*). The study also dwelled on literature in andragogy (Knowles, 1980) and emancipatory learner-centred education (ELCE) (Gravani et al., 2023; Borg, 2021) to develop a more comprehensive theoretical framework. More specifically, by considering that, in the context of the BA AETD's competence-based curriculum, *learner-centred*:

a. *epistemology* can be co-constructed with learners when their experiences, needs, expectations, preferences, aspirations (Knowles, 1980) become explicitly recognizedas having validity in the production of knowledge and skills that are pertinent to adult educators' professionalisation. Subject to the programme and the provider, epistemological co-construction can translate into student-directed and problematised participation in the development of learning outcomes, resources, assessment briefs, etc. As the results section will show, the case study discussed in this chapter explored if/how any of these manifested.

b. *techniques*, such as pair or group work, problem-based, etc. (Schweisfurth, 2013), engage participants as "creative, critical problem-posers, co-investigators and co-discoverers of knowledge" (Borg, 2021, p. 173). However, not as stand-alone, token interactive and collaborative techniques that can be used in all types of programmes;, but as part of the broader framework explained in this section, and with an explicit ELCE agenda.
c. *relationships* impact the nature and extent of voice and decision-making that learners have over their learning (Schweisfurth, 2013) when educator-learner encounters (with communicative, pedagogical, assessment or other purposes) foster democracy through consciousness-raising, counter-narratives, networking, and transformative action (Borg, 2021); and
d. *motivation* is hampered by engagement with learners as "objects of professional generosity" (Borg, 2021, p. 173). The latter is a charity-veiled imposition, and counter-productive for learners' intrinsic motivation. In the framework guiding this study, Schweisfurth's (2013) learner-centred motivation was further unpacked by drawing on research findings on 'academic motivation'—defined as the state when adult students can develop goals and action plans that can mediate the relationship between work-family-school dimensions of the adult student's life (Damianidou, 2020).

3 Methodology and Findings

A case study approach was most suitable because the study comprised an empirical inquiry of issues within a bounded system (Yin, 2009). The case study drew on content and thematic analysis of qualitative data comprising (a) feedback from the 2022–2025 BA AETD student cohort during their first year of studies (i.e., 2022–2023); and (b) annual BA AETD programme review report (*APR Report*) of the same academic year 2022–2023. The analysis of multiple datasets allowed discerning pertinent issues in this case and to triangulate (Yin, 2009).

The Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the University of Malta reviewed and authorized the research design and execution of the study (reference number: EDUC-2024-00335).

3.1 *Part-Time Studies at the UM in a (Post-)COVID-19 crisis*[1]

Following the March 2020 pandemic outburst in Malta (i.e., during the academic year 2019–2020), the UM registered an increase of 30.9% in the number of accepted applications for part-time studies for new courses starting during the academic year 2020–2021, compared to the academic year 2019–2020 (calculated from secondary data provided by the UM SIMS Office, 2024). Both the

UM's and the Faculty of Education's dropout rates before the commencement of part-time students' second year of studies dropped in the academic year (2020–2021) that followed the pandemic outbreak (March 2020), suggesting part-timers could continue studying when enforcement of lock down, remote work and other restrictions were at their peak. However, dropout rates shot up during the following academic year 2021–2022 (UM +37.8%, FoE +14.6%, calculated from secondary data provided by the UM SIMS Office, 2024) suggesting that students could pursue their part-time studies less when the lock-down, mandatory remote work and other restrictions eased.

Notably though, none of the students reading for the part-time evening course leading to a Diploma in AETD dropped out before the start of their second year of studies, or at any other point in time during their course which ran between 2020 and 2022. However, six of the thirteen students reading for the BA AETD under study dropped before the beginning of their second year of studies, i.e., during the academic year 2022–2023. Although to date no research-based explanation is in hand, it can be argued that compared to the BA AETD, the Diploma programme is more manageable for part-time mature students that the two programmes tend to attract, particularly because a number would not have been studying for a while and thus might find the Level 5 of Diploma easier to digest; and particularly because the Diploma course's online modality was more extensive due to COVID-19-related restrictions.

Thus, the study found limits to mitigating the risk of withdrawal from the BA AETD course, particularly in the case of health and family problems. As to the time of writing seven students pursued their studies out of the initial cohort of thirteen: two dropped out of the course during the first two weeks on realizing they could not participate as initially presumed due to personal and professional commitments: one of these was a Maltese woman working full-time (FT) in community development, whilst the second a female restaurant-owner, born in Italy, but living in Malta for numerous years, and working as a part-time adult educator with the DRLLE. The other four dropped out during or by the end of the first year of the programme: a Maltese female working FT in community development to cope with growing professional commitments, a Maltese female working FT as an adult educator and male working FT in real estate needed long term medical care and hospitalization, whilst a Venezuela-born man working FT in banking in Malta had to move country for family reasons concerning his young children. None of the students dropping out explicitly linked this to COVID-19, albeit further research would be needed to shed light on indirect impacts of the (post-)COVID-19 crisis context, as can be inferred from several findings presented in the subsections below.

The seven students who pursued their studies include a Brazilian born Italian woman living in Malta and working FT in hospitality, three Maltese woman

working FT in community development, prevention of addictions, and state services support centre respectively, a Maltese man working as a freelance adult educator, a Costa Rica born woman working FT in Malta as a training analyst with a private company, and a Russia-born woman married in Malta and working as a part-time adult educator with the DRLLE.

The following subsections present the findings of the analysis of the qualitative datasets.

3.2 *Sustainable Participation: Assets and Limitations*

Epistemology. Assets to making the course relevant to the students' personal and professional needs and aspirations include the resources made available, assessment tasks assigned, and the variety of areas of study and topics of the programme. These resulted from course design that was informed by market research, and lecturers' competencies in responding to the needs of the cohort:

> You guys have been overly accommodating and understanding with all the students' needs … (student, evaluation of the study-unit [SU] *ACA2001 Andragogy and Geragogy: Perspectives, Challenges and Practices.* [*ACA2001*])

> Inclusion of assessment tasks that have relevance to students' life beyond this course, e.g., that they can use at work; No examinations. (*APR 2022–2023 Report*)

However, the findings of the analysis illuminate shortfalls of the course in meeting these part-time students' work-study-life balance needs, as will be elaborated in the Discussion section of this chapter. In this regard, the asynchronous component of the course emerged as a main epistemological concern:

> Too many small tasks to carry out in (some of) the components (*APR 2022–2023*).

> Limit … expectations concerning independent study asynchronous work. (*APR 2022–2023 Report*)

Techniques. Group work and group assessment tasks, flexibility and decision-making possibilities emerged as yielding co-investigation and co-discovery, and were recommended for mainstreaming:

> Knowledge of lecturers, e.g., pedagogy … Methods such as group work and assessment. (*APR 2022–2023 Report*)

> Increasing time for group reflection and feedback. (*APR 2022–2023 Report*)

Techniques associated with sustainable participation could be implemented because of the availability of infrastructural assets, technology, online teaching and learning in particular.

> online makes learning easy as it allows me flexibility. (Student, evaluation of SU *ACA2001*)

> Datasets included proposals for further infrastructural supports, some of which can be collaboratively developed and managed with students, e.g., student representatives producing a chart of assessment tasks and due dates, and make this available online. (*APR 2022–2023 Report*)

Relationships. Pastoral care emerged as positively impacting the sustainability of their participation in the course. Students expressed feeling acknowledged and seriously considered:

> The lecturers hear our voices … our struggles, and help us finding the right way to address our doubts and uncertainties. (Student, evaluation of SU *ACA2001*)

> Student-centeredness, ongoing consultation with students using various in/formal channels and methods. (*APR 2022–2023 Report*)

The analysis also revealed that an asset to developing relations among students that foster sustainability practices was scheduling an arts-based study-unit during the first semester of the course:

> Collegiality and comradery between students, initially very much supported (as communicated by students during informal feedback sessions) by scheduling *ACA2002 Arts in the Community: Drama and Music* study-unit in the first semester of the first year. (*APR 2022–2023 Report*)

Motivation. Non-'charity-based' practices that yielded sustainability by motivating the students included drawing motivation from lecturers' passion, the relevance of resources used, and self-paced components:

> passion for the subjects (of lecturers) … (r)elevant resources that support in-depth engagement, e.g., recordings, readings, articles. (*APR 2022–2023 Report*)

> I can adapt reading/researching and re-watching the lectures at my own pace. (Student, evaluation of SU *ACA2001*)

> Motivation and sustainable participation could be hindered by the part-time, evening, remote characteristics of the course that limit on campus presence. (*APR 2022–2023 Report*)

3.3 *The Professionalisation of (Prospective) Adult Educators*

Epistemology. Students experience the course's epistemology as fostering professionalisation when it factors in their prior learning, when it includes self-directed and independent components, and when its relevance to real life scenarios and the diversity between adults in education and training is clear to the students. Data analysis gave evidence of 'eureka'/'epiphanic' moments, i.e., when the students discover and realize the relevance of the course content and outcomes in their work practice. Data below exemplify:

> As an adult learner, my prior knowledge and experience is taken into account and teaching is related to real life situations. (Student, evaluation of SU *ACA2001*)

Students recognize and engage with the reflexive dynamics of this specific course and its contents. They discern their dual role as (prospective) adult educators who are adult learners themselves:

> applying andragogy can make my learning make more sense of the direction of my own learning depending on my own needs and goals. (Student, evaluation of SU *ACA2001*)

> Informal theories are important to consider when reflecting on one's role as an educator and our assumptions as a learner, as these theories shape beliefs about teaching and learning which may then affect actions and behaviors. (Student, evaluation of SU *ACA2001*)

Aside from flagging these realizations in the feedback, as a BA AEDT lecturer the author participated in numerous discussions when students manifested the above during lectures and a debriefing discussion would pursue to consolidate learning outcomes, as will be elaborated in the next section, and in the discussion part of this chapter with reference to ELCE.

Techniques. The datasets under study are rich with evidence that make case for collaborative, discussion-based, experiential, democratic and peer-to-peer techniques used during the teaching and learning encounters. Students

positively appraised instances when they could participate in the design of assessment briefs, discuss pertinent tasks and submission dates:

> Learning from my classmates and lectures experience has enriched my knowledge. (Student, evaluation of SU *ACA2001*)

> We are given the space to comment and discuss … previous experiences, which many times are illustrating the topics covered. (Student, evaluation of SU *ACA2001*)

> I feel very lucky to be asked for my opinion and what works best for me, when setting assessment dates and methods. (Student, evaluation of SU *ACA2001*)

Notably, the last example gives away the novelty of the experience of such collaborative technique, thus suggesting (some) students might perceive the co-creation of their own PD as a one-off lucky strike, rather than a right or a standard. However, collaborative, discussion-based, and peer-to-peer techniques featured as areas of enhancement identified for specific study-units that were experienced as limited on these fronts. This suggests an upward shift in students' expectations on such matters, from the time of the mid-year evaluation of the year-long BA AETD study-unit *ACA2001 Andragogy and Geragogy: Perspectives, Challenges and Practices* (December–January 2023) to the time of the APR (September–December 2023). Excerpts below exemplify:

> Include audience / group feedback opportunities in presentation assessment components. (*APR 2022–2023 Report*)

> Quality assuring lecturers' knowledge and skills of student-centred, less content-dependent and/or asynchronous higher education, teaching, and learning. (*APR 2022–2023 Report*)

Inducing or networking students (in)to the community of practice (e.g., participation in a book launch)also fostered professionalisation outcomes:

> participating in a book launch because I got to listen to many experts in the field and the work being done. (Student, evaluation of SU *ACA2001*)

Relationships. The analysis flagged the relevance of ongoing communication between the students and the course coordinator and lecturers, using various

formal and less formal tools, such as the annual Board of Studies meeting, participation in the APR, and informal updates during lectures:

> Regular informal updates during lectures and to students' reps from the coordinator; Board of Studies meeting agenda; Announcements on *newspoint*, Faculty newsletter—links shared with students; Requesting feedback from student reps on BoS on this APR report prior to submitting. (*APR 2022–2023 Report*)

The analysis also illuminated how the nature of the relationships within the BA AETD community of students and lecturers suggests consciousness-raising:

> Students as partners collaborators, concurrent within the applicable limitations, and prospective once graduates. (*APR 2022–2023 Report*)

The analysis also revealed relationships with stakeholders outside the BA AETD community of students and lecturers are key to the professionalisation of (prospective) adult educators:

> Championing students as ambassadors of this programme and of studies, (and of) research and developments in AE and training locally …. Relations and networks with stakeholders (supported by the Department's outreach programme) to source for placements supervisors guest lecturers / dissertation research, etc. (*APR 2022–2023 Report*)

> Pegging diploma / degree conferment to a warrant for adult educators and trainers: (action points include discussions with MEYR; UM Seed fund application to support consultative research leading to a white paper proposal to introduce warranting. (*APR 2022–2023 Report*)

Motivation. The analysis shed light on student motivation being fuelled by their discernment of a continuum between knowledge and skills targeted in the course and their own goals for professional and personal development:

> All topics covered have been relevant to my learning goals. (Student, evaluation of SU *ACA2001*)

> I want to improve myself and be able to provide … essential and meaningful outcomes. (Student, evaluation of SU *ACA2001*)

BA AETD students and (prospective) adult educators are motivated also because of the societal potential they discern in the adult educator's practice:

> Adult Educators are essential for the well-being of the society. (Student, evaluation of SU *ACA2001*)

> The above is further corroborated by the interest expressed by the students in enhancing the promotion of the BA AETD programme and its students with pertinent stakeholders. (*APR 2022–2023 Report*)

4 Discussion and Conclusions

The study's findings unpack ELCE-driven epistemology and techniques demonstrating the use of personal study and development plans in AE "written in cooperation with the student" (Ramalho Correia, & Mesquita, 2007, p. 11), and using "an intuitive approach grounded in learners' backgrounds" (Brown, 2020). ELCE epistemology translated into 'eureka'/'epiphanic' moments when students independently discovered connections between their practice and the BA AETD. As regards, ELCE-driven motivation and relationships, findings show that the maiden iteration of the BA AETD course is fostering a community (comprising students, academics, and broader stakeholders such as DRLLE and (prospective) employers) eager to shape the culture of AE and the adult educator's identity and (to date, unwarranted) professional status in (post-)-COVID-19 Malta.

Case study methodology limited the scope. A discussion of the relevance of the study's conceptual and theoretical to HE programmes that a curriculum that is not competence-based (e.g., progress-driven curriculum, content-based curriculum, etc.) was out of scope—yet presents an interesting future research possibility. Disaggregating secondary datasets by gender, age, locality of residence, employment status, experience, etc. was out of the scope of this study—yet, surely merits attention in further research. The author is also aware of her extensive involvement in the BA AETD programme, its students, and in the compilation of data sources analysed. Thus, onboarding the results, conclusions, and recommendations cannot ignore limitations to generalisability, intersectional analysis, and bias.

That said, the findings of the case study position BA AETD students as agents (together with a scholars, researchers, policy makers and executives) carving out an emancipatory space to develop and implement long overdue changes in the culture of adult and lifelong education in Malta—namely, reconceptualization and reform of the identity, status and PD of adult educators and

trainers as warranted and recognized experts, who sit on decision-making tables with key state, private, non-governmental and supranational stakeholders of lifelong education in a (post-)COVID-19 context. All this is contingent on an institutional learning-driven reform in HE programmes for (prospective) adult educators State commitment to warranting adult educators and trainers, improving their working conditions and remuneration, and to providing effective work-life-PD supports for the part-time student- adult educator can no longer wait.

Note

1 Data presented in this section includes data concerning part-time studies at the UM and at the Faculty of Education (FoE) because the latter houses the DAOCAE, and hence the initial training and PD courses in adult education, training and development.

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CHAPTER 11

From the Physical to the Virtual Class

The Experiences of Adult Educators during COVID-19 Crisis

Eleni Papaioannou

Abstract

The chapter aims to record adult educators' experiences with the transition from face-to-face to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study sought to record the challenges they faced during this sudden shift, and their attitudes towards online education after this intense experience. The data were drawn from interviews with six adult educators and management staff of a second chance school in Cyprus and the analysis of relevant policy texts/circulars. The study utilized Transformative Learning Theory and Critical Theory as the interpretive lenses. The main themes that emerged were educators' emotional responses to the events, their level of readiness and the transformational effects of their experiences on their professional self-image. The main challenges faced were related to the limited infrastructure, digital skills deficiencies, and the disengagement of learners during the online classes. The implementation of online education in the context of second chance education will not reach its full potential unless the structural weaknesses it has uncovered are addressed.

Keywords

adult educators – online education – COVID-19 – second chance education

1 Introduction

The use of online learning has infiltrated various educational spaces during the last two decades, as the benefits it provides are considered significant (Appana, 2008; Hamid, Waycott, Kurnia & Chang, 2015). According to EU statistics (Eurostat, 2024), in 2023 around 27% of internet users (age 16–74) in the EU stated that they had done an online course or had used online learning material. Online learning has been offered, even before the COVID-19 crisis,

in different forms (i.e., blended, complementary, 100% online) in almost all levels of education from primary (Maher, Lowenthal, York & Richardson, 2014) to secondary (Kersting, Henriksen, Bøe & Angell, 2018; Kokko, Pesonen, Kontu & Pirttimaa, 2015) and post-secondary (Bell & Federman, 2013; Castro & Tumibay, 2021).

Nonetheless, the exceptional conditions imposed on societies during the COVID-19 crisis and the subsequent lockdowns have added new dimensions to the use and efficacy of online learning. The forced cessation of educational institutions in the Spring of 2020 led to the need for supporting measures to safeguard the continuation of studies at all levels. Unsurprisingly, online learning was put at the front line of measures to combat educational disruption. According to UNESCO (2020), more than 1.5 billion students at all levels were affected by the education cessation, followed by an unanticipated transition from face-to-face to online classes.

Digitalization has become a ubiquitous narrative in education during the last two decades, however, nobody could have foreseen the need for such a quick and abrupt transition to digital education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social distancing and the consecutive lockdowns during 2020 and 2021 imposed the need for utilizing technological means even in the most traditional educational systems to avoid the cessation of academic programmes.

The educational systems' readiness to transition from physical to distance education depends on many variables—faculty and students' IT skills, equipment, connectivity capacity, prior experience, culture, attitudes, and beliefs. The pandemic outbreak did not allow the educational systems worldwide to prepare for the transition to distance education. As a result, teachers and students had to adapt quickly to the new conditions, sometimes with minimal support.

Despite the hardships that educators and students have been through during this period, the events that took place can be beneficial for reflection to identify possible deficits and gaps in the educational settings. Accordingly, UNESCO (2020) called for a data-driven understanding of what happened during this crisis to adequately prepare educational systems for future crises.

The current chapter presents a small-scale case study aiming to capture adult educators' immediate experiences regarding the sudden transition from the physical to the online classroom. The study context was a second-chance school in Cyprus that was forced to cease its physical operation and transition to the online environment during the health crisis. The study focused on collecting educators' experiences regarding the transition from the traditional classroom setting to online education. Educators' insights on available resources, the challenges as well as their views regarding online education as a

long-term option for second chance schools in Cyprus are considered important in light of the implementation of a blended learning model for second chance schools.

In the subsequent sections, I will present the context of the study, and the methodological approach, followed by the main findings and the conclusions.

2 Context of the Study

Cyprus exhibits a relatively short history in adult education, resulting from historical and socioeconomic conditions (Gravani & Ioannidou, 2014). The small size of the country, its short history as an independent state, and its limited degree of industrialisation, are some of the factors that contributed to the delayed systematization of the adult education sector. Over the last years and especially after Cyprus became an EU member-state, the field of adult education has been prioritized by local policies, leading to significant advancements in the field.

The current study took place in a public second-chance school (evening school) in an urban area in Cyprus. The school hosts adult students attending the programme to obtain a secondary education certificate. Second chance schools, as part of Cyprus' public educational system, hold a crucial role since they are one of the few institutions providing opportunities for adults who have not found success in traditional educational provisions. At the particular school under study, at the time of the research, there were approximately 120 registered adult learners and around 20 educators.

The learners' body catered by the second chance schools is diverse, consisting of students who previously dropped out of mainstream schools, face socio-economic obstacles, or encounter personal and academic challenges (Papaioannou & Gravani, 2018). Given that, the mission of second chance school is to offer a supportive educational programme that helps learners to achieve their educational objectives.

The adult educator profile in Cyprus is quite fragmented, as it emerges from various professional identities. One reason is the belated development of this sector and the lack of professionalisation in the field (Gravani & Ioannidou, 2014). Furthermore, most of the provisions offering adult education or VET programmes have not set any specific requirements regarding adult educator certification or accreditation for their staff. This led to the creation of a heterogeneous group of people, coming from different fields of study with limited experience in adult education. Another reason for this weak profile is the lack of systematic training in most of the provisions, especially those overseen by

the Ministry of Education, like the second chance schools, the adult education centers, or the state institutes of further education, provisions with a significant number of learners every year (Piliri & Gravani, 2023).

In March 2020, when COVID-19 was declared as a global pandemic, the school where the herein presented study took place faced a rapid shift to remote learning, a status that continued until 2021. Up until then, the school was operating on the basis of the traditional, face-to-face model, despite a 2019 legislation (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth, 2019) that called for the implementation of a blended learning model to all second chance schools. The school closure, starting in March 2020, lasted for almost a year with on-and-off periods. Over this period, the Ministry of Education introduced the use of Microsoft Teams as a collaborative platform to facilitate synchronous and asynchronous learning and the collaboration between the teachers. The current study took place from April to June 2021, following the school's opening.

3 Conceptual Framework

The disruption of normality precipitated by COVID-19 pandemic and the repeated lockdowns set the educators on a trajectory of new experiences, emotions and dilemmas. Observing the events of the period from a distance, the pace of change was so rapid that it led to concentrated experiences that would normally take a much longer time to come to a head, leading to an unprecedented acceleration of digitization across the entire spectrum of education (Cone et al., 2022).Thus, in addition to their teaching roles, the educators went through intensely transformative cognitive experiences.

In decoding this experience, Mezirow's theory of transformative learning offers useful insights and interpretive concepts for an in-depth understanding of educators' experiences. The basic theory of transformative learning, as formulated by Mezirow (1991, 1994, 2000) and similar theories (Cranton, 2006, 1997; Dirkx, 2001; Taylor, 1998), define learning as a process of fundamental change within the individual. Transformative learning theories could be useful in addressing contemporary challenges such as the rapid technological advances and the ever-changing social and workplace conditions (McWhinney & Markos, 2003; Mezirow, 1991).

What initiates learning in adults, according to the transformative learning theory, is a challenge conceptualized by Mezirow (2000) as a disorienting dilemma. Thus, transformation occurs as a consequence of an intense event in a person's life, such a natural disaster, the death of a loved one, a divorce, or the loss of a job. Such experiences can be stressful or painful to such an extent

that they force the individual to radically question and negotiate their perceptions of themselves and of the world (Mezirow, 1990). Mezirow (1990, 1991) calls these kinds of experiences disorienting dilemmas and argues that they are often the trigger for an individual to enter a process of critical reflection.

The disorienting dilemmas manifested as challenges in adult life, activated the reform of individuals' established frames of references (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2003). Through rather complex processes the individual is confronted with a disruption of the equilibrium in their established perspectives and the world as previously experienced. This disruption leads to the state of critical reflectivity, where an individual begins to reflect on the new conditions, trying to adjust hers/his thinking and making meaning out of it. Eventually, this results in the reforming of their perspectives, making them broader and more inclusive (Mezirow, 2000, 2003). This is the process through which learning takes place in the form of transformed perspectives and views based on the constructivism core idea that learning creates meaning from experience (Taylor & Cranton, 2013).

A projection of transformative learning theory onto the conditions of the shift to the online education during COVID-19, could suggest that the rapid disruption of educational continuity induced dilemmas for educators. The shift to a virtual class, the new modes and tools for teaching, and the new order in social relations could be seen as contradictive to the previously held assumptions and experiences and even to educators' professional identities (Sequeira & Daney, 2020). In some cases, this contradiction went beyond mere incompatibility and was experienced as trauma by some educators (Etchells et al., 2021; Housel, 2023).

In this chapter, online learning is considered a form of distance learning based on online platforms that allow both synchronous and asynchronous communication between users. Being much more than merely a transfer of the learning procedure from a physical location to a virtual one, online learning is "the use of the Internet to access learning materials; to interact with the content, instructor, and other learners; to obtain support during the learning process, to acquire knowledge, to construct personal meaning, and to grow from the learning experience" (Ally, 2008, p. 5).

Online learning aligns well with adult education principles, providing distinct benefits, such as flexibility (Daymont, Blau & Campbell, 2011), thus facilitating the integration of learning into adults' complex lives; accessibility, enabling learners from remote and underserved areas to access educational programmes and resources; and personalized learning experience, by adapting to learners' needs, learning styles and goals (Mikić, Ilić, Kopanja & Vesin, 2022). Furthermore, it enhances learners' and educators' digital competencies,

technological self-efficacy and self-regulation skills (Redecker, 2017). On the other hand, online learning imposes challenges: unequal access to connectivity and devices leading to a digital divide, lack of digital skills that hinder the effectiveness of online teaching and learning (van Dijk, 2017), and limited social interaction (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005). Educators must handle excess workload (Tynan, Ryan & Lamont-Mills, 2015), sustain learners' motivation by creating engaging content and use relevant evaluation methods (Terblanché, 2015). Furthermore, students' disengagement in online settings is another area of concern for educators and policymakers (Bergdahl, 2022). Consequently, online learning is not a neutral and static reality, but rather functions as a space of both disruption and potential transformation for educators and learners.

However, transformation in the context of transformative learning theory cannot be seen as a de facto process that applies to all individuals who go through similar experiences. Taylor and Cranton (2013) denote a gap in the theory, since not all individuals confronting challenges are willing to engage in and construct new meanings. Although they propose the "desire to learn" as the missing element that bridges this gap, the question of who engages in transformative learning and who does not, remains at stake (Taylor & Cranton, 2013).

Additionally, the current research incorporates critical theory, a framework that provides the space for interpreting education as embedded in the social context and influenced by power relations and dominant ideologies (Freire, 2000). According to Brookfield (2005), a critical theory of adult education should suggest ways in which education can contribute to a society based on justice and compassion. This perspective becomes even more important when learners come from marginalized groups.

4 Methodological Approach

The study aimed to record the experiences of adult educators with and during the transition to online classes during the pandemic. To achieve its aim the study addressed three key questions: what were the educators' experiences during the transition to online education and the period of its implementation? What challenges did they encounter during the transition and while delivering online classes? Finally, what were their attitudes toward online learning as a long-term practice in the context of second chance education? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to provide insights into the evolving role of online education in the context of second chance schools, especially in the aftermath of COVID-19.

The methodological strategy followed the qualitative paradigm as the most suitable approach for understanding the meaning that individuals construct (Merriam, 1998). According to Erickson (2023) "qualitative inquiry seeks to discover and to describe narratively what particular people do in their everyday lives and what their actions mean to them" (p. 33). The exploratory nature of qualitative research and the contextual sensitivity matched the goals of the current study that investigated a novel phenomenon, with limited existing research in an effort to explore educators' personal experiences and meanings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The case study approach incorporated in the study provided contextual understanding through the investigation of school's operating mode, the analysis of relevant documents and other contextual factors that influenced educators' experiences during the pandemic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2018).

The participants of the study were six educational staff members, consisting of frontline educators and administration members. Five participants were educators, and one participant had only administrative duties (Table 11.1).

The participants included an equal gender distribution as three of them were males and three females. Regarding their expertise, one educator was a Math teacher, two were Greek language teachers, one was an English teacher, one was a Chemistry teacher, and one had expertise in Music. Their years of service ranged from 5 to 28 at the time of the study.

The diversity of the participants contributed to a more thorough understanding of the instructional and operational effects that the pandemic had on the school's environment. Furthermore, the inclusion of administrative staff aimed to provide a more holistic view of the experiences, challenges, and adaptations during the pandemic.

Data collection was performed using in-depth open-ended interviews. The use of open-ended questions provided the space for the educators to freely express experiences, challenges, and emotional responses emerging from the

TABLE 11.1 Participants' profile

Participant	Educator	Administrative staff	Years of service	Gender
1	x		20	Male
2	x		14	Male
3	x		12	Female
4		x	28	Female
5	x		19	Female
6	x		5	Male

conditions imposed during COVID-19 (Patton, 2014). Additionally, in-depth interviews facilitated the unveiling of the complexities of educators' professional lives during the pandemic (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviews lasted between 40' and 75'.

Data analysis followed the six stages of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis of participants' interviews, seeking to identify patterns of meaning across the data. During the first phase, the data were transcribed and read thoroughly multiple times, enabling the researcher to familiarise with their content and extract preliminary ideas. In the second phase, initial codes were generated based on the most interesting interview extracts that could shed light on educators' experiences during online education. The coding was performed manually, using notes on the text. This process assisted in the identification of similar codes across the data, which, in the third phase, were collated to generate broader themes. The fourth phase led to the revision of the initial themes to identify which ones were well-supported by the data and useful to the investigation of educators' experiences. Accordingly, some themes were dropped as not supported by enough data or not being relevant to the core study, and others were refined to meet the study's objectives. In the fifth phase, the themes were finalised and named to capture the essence of participants' narratives. Finally, interview extracts were used to support each theme leading to the reporting of data. Through this analytical framework, the major themes that were identified are: (a) stress and anxiety as emotional responses, (b) low level of readiness, (c) effects on professional self-image and resilience, (d) lack of skills and infrastructure, (d) considerations about online education as a long-term option for second chance schools.

Furthermore, the study incorporated document analysis (Bowen, 2009) as a methodological tool to deepen comprehension regarding the school's operation and the policies enacted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth during the pandemic. The document analysis included official guidelines and circulars issued by the Ministry that revealed the educational strategies and decision-making processes during that period.

While this study provides valuable insights on the events of this period, there are limitations to be considered during the interpretation of the results. First, this is a small qualitative study in one out of the five second chance school operating island wide. Consequently, the conclusions are not generalisable, although they provide a general idea of the processes and the challenges of the events under study. Another limitation is the fact that it includes data coming only from the part of the educators and it does not include the learners' perspectives. Despite these limitations, future studies can build upon its results and expand the scope to include other perspectives on the matter, such as the learners' views.

5 Findings

5.1 *Experiences of Transition to Online Education*

The goal of the current study was to collect the experiences of adult educators during the abrupt transition to online teaching. As seen below, the main themes that emerged refer to educators' emotional responses to this sudden disruption, reflections on their level of preparedness and, finally, how they negotiated issues of professional self-image and resilience during and after this crisis. These themes are supported by participants' own words, which bring to light the depth and diversity of their experiences and convey their reflections on the identified themes.

5.2 *Emotional Responses*

Transitioning to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic provoked a series of emotional responses from adult educators and from administration staff, starting from the initial shock followed by stress and anxiety. At first, the educators as well as the school's administration went through a period of shock evoked from the abrupt shift from traditional teaching to the online platform. The unprecedented circumstances and the need to maintain educational continuity by implementing fast changes led to these emotions.

The metaphor that characterises the initial shift to online education as a shock was used by a school administration member, a person who had a more holistic view of the processes that took place at that period:

> It was a shock … initially, it was a big shock. Nobody knew how to react. We had so many problems to deal with … how to help the students, how to help the teachers. We were not prepared at all. No infrastructure, the teachers were unfamiliar with the online platform, and so were the students. We had to get the credentials from the Ministry for everyone and send them to the students. The students encountered many difficulties before they learned how to connect to the platform and understand how it works. Personally, as a principal, I went through a shock until we managed to get things in order. Of course, even after that there were many problems. It wasn't that everything was solved. [P4]

The lockdown conditions as well as the disruption of the school continuity and the transition to online education naturally triggered feelings of stress and anxiety. The most stressful factors were the difficulties encountered in using digital tools, the lack of familiarity with the virtual environment, the absence of personal contact and the impersonal nature of distance learning.

One educator described his hardship in familiarising himself with the online platform:

> In the beginning, for me, it was very stressful. I had to go online to search how to implement simple steps, like how to connect to the online platform ... It was very stressful. I wanted to help them (the students) more ..., but I realized that I couldn't be as active as in the classroom, and this made me feel of course uncomfortable. [...] Sometimes I started stressing the day before ... wondering if I would manage to log in on time, if I would be well-prepared. I adapted eventually, but the hard way, with anxiety and a lot of effort. [P2]

Another educator remarked that there is an inverse relationship between feelings of anxiety and the level of teachers' digital skills. Although she considered herself to have a high level of digital skills, she nevertheless mentioned the anxiety of getting familiar with the online platform.

> A key component was familiarity with technology. However, it took me a short time to get familiar with the specific platform proposed by the Ministry through which the course was to be conducted. Although I wasn't stressed, I was anxious to familiarize myself with this particular tool. [P3]

Similarly, a participant [P6], who did not mention any distress arising from the shift to online education, attributed this to his advanced skills in using technology. Additionally, the emotional toll resulting from social distancing and isolation negatively impacted the educators' well-being. An educator said:

> I missed the human contact ... The interaction with people. I was in front of a "box" and just talking. [...] I was in front of this box listening only to voices. This was very hard on me., but I had to find the strength to go on and to support the students as well. [P2]

Another educator noted: "At the beginning, it was hard, stressful ... Over time we adapted. However, I missed the discussions, the way I was used to organizing them (in the class)" [P1].

From another perspective, an educator talked about the overwhelming situation before the beginning of online education, when the students stopped coming to school to avoid spreading the virus. She noted: "My stress was more before the lockdown when the students had stopped coming to the classes.

When we transitioned to the online classes, I somehow felt relieved, as I saw them returning to learning" [P5].

Educators' emotional responses to the online education shift manifested mainly as stress and anxiety of various intensities were normal, considering the rapid pace of changes. However, the systemic unpreparedness and the organisation's educational tradition rooted in more conventional educational modes exacerbated the situation. The following part presents the educators' and administration's opinions regarding the level of professional and systemic readiness.

5.3 *Level of Readiness*

The participants unanimously agreed that they were unprepared to face the challenges of transitioning to online education. The systemic unpreparedness could be attributed to the fact that the school as an organisation was functioning in a traditional context offering only face-to-face education. Consequently, the low level of readiness was no surprise. A participant revealed, "Based on my previous knowledge and skills, I wasn't prepared for online education. I didn't have any training, only the knowledge I developed during my years as a teacher" [P5]. The view of the school's administration member is illuminative.

> They were not prepared at all. How could they be prepared? They had never used such means before. Many, especially the older ones, didn't even know how to use a computer. The school was also completely unprepared. We had no previous experience. It was all completely new, and we had to adapt quickly. [P4]

The educators received online training focused on using the platform by the Ministry of Education and certain resources (manuals, guidelines, support) were provided to them. Nevertheless, the training was not sufficient to address all educators' needs, but rather it was an emergency solution. They had to navigate through difficulties using self-learning strategies (i.e., exploration, trial and error learning) or with the support of colleagues. A participant says that, "Even when I had some queries my colleagues were providing me with answers. Cause I'm that kind of person … When I don't know something, I ask for help. I don't stress" [P5]. Communities of learning emerged among the educators, supporting them to navigate through the challenges, resulting in new knowledge and better skills.

> I wasn't feeling ready in any way. I felt ready along the way. We didn't know what it was about when we shifted to the platform. We learned

> along the way and in collaboration with remarkable IT colleagues. In essence, he learned, and I learned with him. [P6]

Lack of readiness is of course not surprising in conditions as extreme as those experienced during the pandemic. However, education systems in small and peripheral countries that do not exhibit the degree of digital upgrading of other Western countries have found themselves initially in much more difficult circumstances and needed much more effort to adapt. On the other hand, in the case of Cyprus, the small size of the educational system and the highly centralised system of governance proved to be positive catalysts in the faster transition to online education during that period.

5.4 *Professional Self-image and Resilience*

Through the interviews, a dynamic trajectory of teachers' sense of professional self-image was recorded. The initial hardship during the adaptation phase left them with feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. The transition from the security of the traditional classroom setting, exposed gaps regarding their digital competencies and even teaching efficacy, leading in some cases to the erosion of educators' self-esteem.

A participant described how he managed the situation to protect his professional self-image and eventually even strengthen it.

> I did my best to keep the students engaged … I was giving them assignments … I was trying to keep them active by asking questions. […] I put a lot of time into this, cause personally I had free time—although not all teachers had—, to learn the platform as much as I could, and to adapt my work to the online environment. […] I did my best to respond to the challenges. […] Eventually, I wasn't feeling vulnerable. I started feeling well. [P6]

The same pattern of initial negative effect on professional self-image that later was restored is revealed by other participants: "On a scale up to 100, I think—because I want to be positive—it got to 50. […] Initially, it affected my sense of self, but afterward, I overcame it" [P1]. Another educator said:

> In the beginning, I lost my self-esteem. I needed to enhance it. That's why I worked hard with technology to feel efficient again. I dug my heels in … I said, 'I won't let myself feel like that'. And I managed to live through it. […] Our level of self-confidence as teachers is very important due to the image that our students have of us. [P2]

A female educator depicted how the whole process led her to a path of empowerment and resilience, emphasizing the role of collective support among the community of educators.

> I felt I did well. […] To be honest I felt stronger because I felt that I was doing well. Even in front of a laptop, not only in the classroom. I felt very nice about this because eventually, I managed. […] It was amazing what we all managed to do. We didn't give up and continued our work through the platform. [P5]

Similarly, another participant interpreted the whole experience as positive since the challenges engaged her in a learning process, which led to further professional development.

> The whole process positively impacted my self-image. I saw the experience as a challenge to which I had to respond. I encountered a new field that I had to get to know. It was necessary to further my knowledge and engagement beyond the mandatory teaching time to advance my knowledge. [P3]

It became evident that navigating through challenges in times of change impacted educators in a complex way. The following section delves into the main challenges faced during that demanding period.

5.5 *Challenges*

Limited infrastructure Through the educators' and the administration's narratives it became prominent that one of the main challenges that led to distress and low quality of the provided online education was the limited availability of infrastructure.

The administration member provided an account of the infrastructure picture of the organisation:

> We had no equipment at all, only 2–3 laptops. Even when educators returned to school during the second phase of COVID-19 and had to conduct online lessons while students were at home, we still had no equipment and faced numerous problems, such as a non-functioning internet connection. Teachers had to bring their own equipment, including computers. In the beginning, some did not even have cameras or speakers. [P4]

The educators' narratives confirmed this picture. A participant explained: "I was using my own laptop. The one I was given from the school in no way could cope, it was slow" [P6]. Another educator referred to the problems encountered because of limited resources:

> I was using my own laptop at home. The school couldn't cover us. We've tried to do the online teaching from school, but the network was crashing all the time … we didn't have internet access, so we got permission from the Ministry to stay at home and work from there. [P5]

Another educator highlighted the disparity in the speed at which schools were equipped, implying that this particular school was not treated equally.

> This crisis has caused concern to all schools. They have become more aware …. Other schools have already installed computers and projectors in all classrooms to enable the teachers to cover their students when there is a need to remain home. This does not apply to our school because it has limited resources. There is still no equipment. [P5]

Furthermore, the participants considered the fact that the students had limited equipment a challenge that hindered their effort to deliver quality online education. According to a participant: "The students had to deal with the problem of lack of equipment. They were attending using their mobile phones" [P5]. On the same line, another educator stated: "Most of them were using their mobile devices … they didn't have computers, and this was making things even more challenging" [P2].

The following delineation of facts regarding the available resources by the administration member provides the same picture:

> Most of our students did not have computers and ended up attending lessons on their mobiles. Eventually, the Ministry sent us some tablets, but there weren't many. Their instruction was to give them to the most vulnerable students, those who had no means to attend. We distributed them, but the tablets were of poor quality, and eventually, the students ended up back on their mobiles. [P4]

5.6 *Digital Skills Deficiencies*

Apart from the essentiality of infrastructure in the framework of online education, another vital component is the presence of necessary skills among both

educators and students. The data collected exhibit a low to average level of skills at both ends. Despite the initial frustration brought about by the limited digital skills, educators contest how the experience of transitioning to an online platform forced them to further develop their skills through self-learning and experimentation.

A participant talked about her initial struggle to use the online platform due to her lacking advanced digital skills. It is also interesting how her self-experimentation eventually advanced her skills:

> My digital skills were average., but I didn't know the online platform at all. My knowledge was only theoretical. [...] In the end, by experimenting, I learned to use the platform very efficiently and that benefited me in the long term. [P5]

Limited skills and the unfamiliar environment of the online platform compromised the quality of the education provided by hindering the implementation of the necessary educational procedures. A participant reflected on his experience: "I had some knowledge of technology from before. I used to deliver interactive lessons. However, I found the platform hard to use. I didn't know, for example, how to send my assignments" [P2].

Other educators explained how they used digital skills and IT competencies acquired before the pandemic or during the period through self-learning or training:

> I acquired my knowledge of technology on my own. I tend to get involved in technology. Don't assume I was a tech freak, but I spent time learning. [...] I also devoted time to learning the platform, unlike other colleagues who might not have the time to do so. [P6]

Another educator described:

> I belong to an age group that was "exposed" early on to the use of IT and technology in general. Therefore, I acquired some skills in using technology empirically through friction. Certainly, some individual seminars improved my knowledge and skills in this regard. [P3]

Some participants reported difficulties due to learners' low digital skills, further challenging the learning process. Many students struggled to use the digital platform and, in some cases, the educators had to put extra effort into providing basic digital literacy support. One participant unveiled that, "the

students have not been trained at all. Not all of them had the equipment and not all of them had the basic digital skills" [P3]. Another educator depicted the double challenge learners experienced: "For the students, the difficulties doubled! They had difficulties in Mathsanyway, but now (during online education) these difficulties were more. They faced challenges using technology" [P1].

An educator talked about how he had to put extra effort into guiding the learners on how to use the platform, despite his own challenges in using technology:

> I was expecting the students, that are younger than me, to help me with technology, but on the contrary, eventually, I was the one helping them. They had difficulties finding the learning material, and I had to guide them step-by-step. It wasn't easy for them either. [P2]

Furthermore, another participant confirmed students' challenges due to low levels of digital skills and knowledge in using the platform, which negatively affected learning outcomes.

> I tried to engage them in some assignments, but they said they didn't know how to do them online. They said that no one had trained them to use the platform. They didn't understand how the platform functioned. They would connect to it and listen, but that was all. Nothing else. [P6]

5.7 *Learners' Disengagement*

Learners' disengagement was identified as another layer of complexity by most participants. It was attributed to the structural obstacles imposed by the lack of infrastructure and the use of mobile devices as an emergency solution. Additionally, educators interpreted this disengagement as a result of weak digital skills and the obstacles in using the online platform.

> I think the biggest difficulty I encountered was the participation of the students. In one sense they were justified because they received no training on distance learning and the platform we were using. [...] The challenge was keeping students engaged since they were behind a screen and could "hide" more easily. [P3]

Educators interpreted some students' disengagement as a lack of effort from their side. An educator revealed, "In some classes, I told the students 'Guys, I feel alone here. Say something. I don't feel comfortable'. Usually, somebody would come up saying 'We are here', but I think they weren't there" [P6]. The

administrative staff believed that "many students took advantage of the situation, they would go into online classes and do nothing" [P4], while someone else agrees that the students, being overwhelmed from everyday cares, while technically present, they were not academically involved in the sessions:

> The students were happy. It was better for them. Because they were coming home from work tired, they could sit at home, lounging in bed and taking their classes without the stress of missing school. Because our students, don't forget, are adults; meaning they see it from the positive side. [...] Students who don't care to learn took advantage of the online teaching. They weren't attending the classes. [P5]

While the issue of disengagement in online learning due is already well-documented in the literature, from a critical standpoint, the educators' views do ignore—in this particular instance—the obstacles students encountered, as for example, the limited equipment, the unfamiliar online environment, and the absence of preparation for this transition.

5.8 *Online Learning as a Long-term Practice*

The educators expressed their opinions regarding implementing online education in a blended learning model for second-chance schools in the long term. The partial implementation of online learning is a reform that fits learners' profiles and needs, since they are adults managing multiple roles in their daily lives. A participant highlighted the benefits of online learning for this particular group of students, while acknowledging at the same time the drawback of reduced social interaction: "Because our students are working and have families, distance learning will suit them, but they will lose something important, socialization, which is very important to them" [P2]. Another one had a similar view:

> The implementation of online education will largely support our students. Because the students here are adults, they are working. Some of them work two jobs, so distance learning will greatly help them. Those who cannot come will study through the platform. [P5]

However, based on the pandemic period experiences, the success of the reform is highly connected to some prerequisites. Proper training of the learners, incentivizing them and providing the needed equipment and network accessibility both for learners and educators are seen as essential. A participant stressed the need for providing motives and training to the learners: "If they don't mobilise students and convince them that distance learning has about

the same results as face-to-face learning, if they don't train them properly, students will likely not succeed" [P6], while two others identify the core conditions for the implementation of an online learning model:

> The school should prepare them. We have students who have difficulties in using technology. The school must help them learn. [...] We have students who don't even have a laptop. They cannot afford it. Is the Ministry willing to help them? It doesn't depend only on the willingness of the school to implement online learning. [P2]

> The school as an organisation needs to support such a decision. There is a need for more equipment, well-prepared spaces for the teachers who deliver online classes, and better internet connection. Otherwise, the teachers should teach from home using their own equipment. [P5]

The fast-changing nature of education is not being accepted unanimously, as technology in its broader sense, is not neutral. Opposing opinions prioritise alternative values and goals rising from personal ideological and philosophical views and they should not be ignored.

> I wouldn't say I'm negative about technology, but I've always been cautious. I couldn't adapt. Okay. I took some classes at university, but I just read to pass them., but that's about it. It's more of a lifestyle. It's not that I can't cope. [...] In general, I have a more ecological ideology. Somebody could say it's a weakness on my part, but for me, it's an attitude towards life. [...] I'm not a denier or anything like that. I just don't negotiate my freedom. [P1]

6 Conclusion

Looking from the perspective of transformational learning theory (Mezirow, 2000, 2003), the experience of the pandemic induced a collective transformation of held assumptions regarding health, safety, the relationship between private and public, and, of course, education. The confrontation with the "not-knowing" of the crisis added new dimensions to lifelong learning and advanced people's competencies in self-development (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020).

As educators found themselves in a context where everything changed so absurdly, the transformation as conceived in Mezirow's theory, became not a choice, but an ultimate necessity for their professional survival. The adversities

that arose from the deconstruction of the traditional learning space drove educators outside their comfort zone, as was reported in other contexts (Bailey et al., 2022; Santagata et al., 2023).

Amid multiple deficiencies and a low level of systemic readiness, teachers assumed the additional role of learners to navigate the change. Educators-as-learners identified the existing gaps in their skills and knowledge, a process that caused a professional crisis. In the framework of Mezirow's theory, this crisis induced a disorienting dilemma that forced educators to reflect critically on their assumptions and reconsider established perceptions regarding teaching and learning, a pattern detected in similar studies (James, 2021; Young et al., 2022).

A disorienting dilemma, however, can lead to stress and anxiety (Roberts, 2013), feelings that were reported in the participants' narratives. Housel (2023) documented that adult educators had to manage multiple stressors beyond those triggered by the changes in the learning environment, such as the safety and health of themselves and their families, managing social isolation, financial issues, and managing their households in the lockdown. Feelings of uncertainty and anxiety were interpreted, according to Housel (2023), as processes that caused trauma to educators or brought up past traumatic experiences. Social isolation and distancing from the students were additional stressors reported by the participants.

Furthermore, this emergency situation initiated educators' self-reflection. Through these mental processes, they identified gaps in their skills and knowledge and re-evaluated their teaching strategies to the degree that other systemic obstacles (lack of infrastructure, students' low digital skills) allowed them. Moreover, not all educators provided evidence of engaging in critical reflection (Lundgren & Poell, 2016) by critically examining their own practices or analysing issues related to learners' social positionality. Although the available research regarding adult education in Cyprus is limited, previous studies support that learners attending second chance schools face social, economic, and educational vulnerabilities (Papaioannou & Gravani, 2018). Additionally, it has been reported that learner-centered practices are not widely used in adult education programmes (Gravani, Hatzopoulos & Papaioannou, 2021). Participants' narratives provided a rather descriptive account of the situation during the pandemic. Still, they did not go deeper into critically reflecting on learners' vulnerabilities or their own practices that might not have been learner-oriented.

Perhaps the most prominent part of educators' transformational learning is the change in their perspective regarding the nature of teaching. The experience of the pandemic forced them to engage in new modes of teaching, new tools, and a new environment. By gaining new skills and knowledge,

they expanded their capacity to deliver online classes and to better respond to crises. Research from different contexts and countries has provided similar evidence (Young et al., 2022; Teo, Tan & Chan, 2021).

Additionally, the initial negative feelings in the background of multiple challenges led to transformations in educators' professional self-image. Educators' professional self-image is dynamic and influenced by their own perceptions and other external factors, such as how students perceive them (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). As they found themselves on a challenging learning curve struggling to adapt to a new reality and overcome difficulties in using the latest teaching tools, the educators experienced an initial erosion of their self-image and self-confidence. Teachers experienced an "alienation towards reality" that disassembled their self-image (Ramploud, Funghi & Mellone, 2022). In the quest for balance, educators underwent various adaptation processes, including self-reflection, self-learning, skill development, and peer support, leading to a renewed sense of resilience. The self-perceived success in adapting to the online education environment and using new digital tools empowered their professional identity.

In the context of Cyprus, the transition to online education during COVID-19 offers significant insights to support the implementation of the blended learning model, which started after the end of the pandemic. Retrospectively, the participants provided a picture of the challenges that arose and suggested outlining the most prominent prerequisites (Figure 11.1) for the successful application of online education.

The data drawn from the interviews indicated a series of deficiencies that hindered educators and learners and eventually compromised the quality of education.

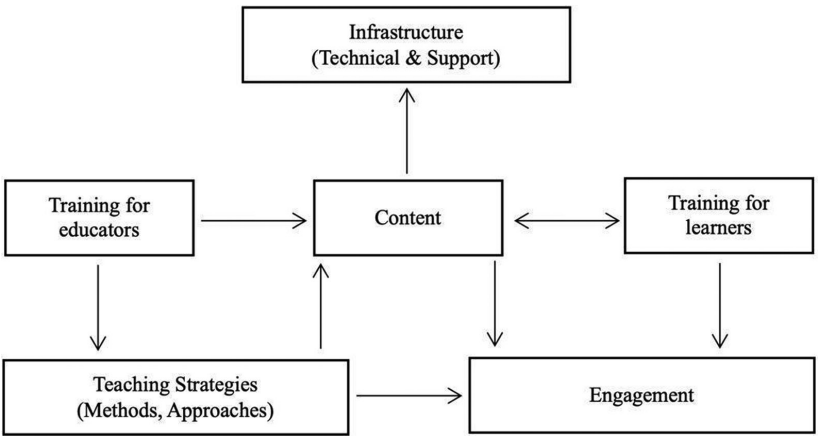

FIGURE 11.1 Prerequisites for a successful implementation of online learning

One of the most important challenges during COVID-19 was the limited availability of infrastructure especially to the learners and the school, which caused educational losses during the school closure. It has been supported that one of the main components of a successful online education model is infrastructure (Moore & Fodre, 2018; Zhou, Wu, Zhou & Li, 2020), consisting, among others, of equipment, software, connectivity, and an IT supportive team. The current study showcased that learners belonging to marginalised/vulnerable groups have limited access to infrastructure, especially equipment, and connectivity. In this case, the learners need support to successfully participate in online classes, such as the provision of equipment and connectivity by the organisation.

Training is another significant component of online education. Preparing educators to deliver meaningful online classes includes not only their familiarisation with technology, but also training on appropriate teaching strategies to ensure the well-catered needs of the learners (Gibbons & Wentworth, 2001; Sun & Chen, 2016). In the case of second chance schools, the learners' low digital skills indicate an additional need for the provision of training to them as well.

Furthermore, designing appropriate teaching content that meets the needs of the learners with specific characteristics as those attending second chance schools should be prioritized. Curriculum adjustments are also needed to facilitate adult-centered online teaching and learners' engagement (Sun & Chen, 2016).

The implementation of the blended learning model in Cyprus' second chance schools with limited modifications compared to the online education provided during COVID-19, raises doubts regarding its quality and efficiency. Considering the adult learners of second chance schools, the research confirms the existence of a digital divide which includes, inter alia, limited web accessibility (Van Dijk, 2017) and low digital skills (Hargittai, 2018) among people from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, providing online education to people from these social origins without addressing their digital deficits might perpetuate existing inequalities, instead of alleviating them. The results demonstrate the need for additional efforts on the part of policymakers to support second chance schools. From the perspective of critical theory, which investigates power dynamics and social inequalities, only through such efforts will the reform that introduced blended learning provide a genuine remedial education and offer these individuals real equal opportunities in education and, by extension, opportunities for success in their professional and social lives. On the contrary, maintaining the conditions of online education recorded during the pandemic period, without drastic interventions and corrections of

the weaknesses as proposed here, will lead to the reproduction of inequalities, trapping learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in a vicious cycle.

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Final Reflections

CHAPTER 12

Adult Educators in a Changing World

Resilience, Professionalisation, and the Struggle for Social Transformation

Carmel Borg

Abstract

Adult educators are increasingly challenged to navigate shifting cultural landscapes, redefine their professional identities, and develop new strategies for managing uncertainty. In an era of social, political, and technological transformation, adult educators are facing unprecedented challenges. Rapid digitalisation, evolving learner needs, increasing job precarity, and global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical conflicts have reshaped the landscape of adult education. As a result, there is a growing need for professionalisation, resilience, and critical engagement among adult educators to navigate these shifts effectively. This chapter looks into this volume and particular chapters and gives analytical overview with the critical reflections on the evolving roles of adult educators in the context of crises, challenges and educational practices.

Keywords

adult education – crisis – adult educators – challenges

1 Introduction

This volume brings together diverse perspectives on the evolving role of adult educators, exploring competence validation, professional identity, resilience-building, activism, and transformative education practices. In the face of crises across Europe, adult educators are increasingly challenged to navigate shifting cultural landscapes, redefine their professional identities, and develop new strategies for managing uncertainty. At the heart of these challenges lies a fundamental question: *Who are we as adult educators, and what do we advocate for?* The chapters collectively address core questions about what it means to be an adult educator today, how professional competencies can be recognised

and strengthened, and how educators can remain adaptive, engaged, and committed to social change while responding to societal disruptions and fostering inclusive learning communities.

A recurring theme across these discussions is the necessity of resilience, both at the individual and systemic levels. Resilience is not simply about enduring hardship; it is about developing adaptive strategies, fostering strong professional identities, and engaging in continuous learning. For example, the GRETA competence validation procedure, examined in depth, is presented as a tool that not only legitimizes informal learning, but also strengthens emotional, cognitive, social, and systemic resilience among adult educators. Similarly, Communities of Practice (CoPs) emerge as vital mechanisms for collective learning, peer support, and professional solidarity, especially in times of crisis.

Beyond resilience, this book also highlights the activist dimension of adult education. Several chapters explore how educators—whether working in solidarity schools, crisis response, or global citizenship education—play a crucial role in fostering democratic engagement, critical consciousness, and social justice. Drawing on critical pedagogy and transformative learning theories, these discussions emphasise the importance of education as a means of empowerment and resistance.

Another critical issue addressed is the digital transformation of education. The pandemic accelerated the shift to virtual learning, exposing both opportunities and inequalities within adult education. Chapters on digital adaptation, second-chance education, and professionalisation in Slovenia and Ukraine explore the new skills, policies, and support structures required for educators to thrive in this changing landscape. These discussions also raise key policy concerns, including equity in access to education, mental health support for educators, and the need for institutional recognition of adult education as a profession.

By engaging with these pressing issues, this volume provides a comprehensive reflection on the state of adult education today. It challenges readers to rethink the professional identity of adult educators, the role of education in crisis situations, and the strategies needed to build a resilient and socially engaged adult education sector. Ultimately, it argues that adult educators are not merely facilitators of knowledge, but agents of change, whose work is essential for fostering inclusive, democratic, and sustainable societies.

What follows is an in-depth exploration of the key takeaways from each chapter, carefully synthesising their core contributions, thematic significance, and broader implications for the field of adult education. By examining these discussions collectively, this synthesis not only highlights the relevance and

importance of each contribution, but also seeks to extend the arguments forward—raising new questions, identifying emerging challenges, and proposing potential pathways for further research, policy development, and pedagogical innovation. Rather than simply summarising findings, this analysis connects ideas across chapters, illustrating the intersections between different themes and their implications for the future of adult education as a field of practice and inquiry. Through this approach, the following synthesis aims to provide a critical and forward-looking perspective, emphasising how adult educators can navigate contemporary challenges, enhance their professional roles, and contribute to transformative learning experiences within diverse educational and societal contexts.

2 Wanted Resilient and Competent Adult Educators

In an ever-changing educational landscape, adult educators face mounting professional challenges, from job insecurity to evolving learner needs and increasing expectations. The chapter by Brigitte Bosche and Susanne Lattke examines the GRETA competence validation procedure, highlighting its significance not only as a tool for professionalisation, but also as a means of fostering resilience among educators.

One of the most compelling aspects of GRETA is its capacity to validate informal and experiential learning. In a field where many practitioners lack formal credentials, GRETA offers recognition of competencies that might otherwise remain invisible. This process of validation does more than enhance career prospects; it instils a sense of professional legitimacy, reinforcing educators' confidence in their skills. By naming and documenting expertise, GRETA transforms experience into evidence, giving educators a stronger foothold in an often-unregulated profession.

Beyond professional validation, the survey findings discussed in the chapter suggest that GRETA fosters job satisfaction, motivation, and professional identity. These elements are crucial in countering the pressures that can lead to burnout. When educators see their work acknowledged and valued, and they are recognised for their competencies, they are more likely to find meaning in their roles, remain committed to professional growth, and approach challenges with a sense of purpose.

The chapter's discussion of resilience in relation to GRETA is particularly insightful. Resilience is not simply about enduring difficulties or bouncing back, but about developing adaptive strategies that allow professionals to thrive. Adult educators who feel valued and recognised for their competencies

are better equipped to handle stress, rejection, or professional setbacks (Knowles, 1980).

Cognitively, the structured self-reflection process involved in GRETA encourages educators to critically assess their strengths, identify areas for growth, and set realistic career goals. Validation through GRETA reinforces a sense of self-efficacy, ensuring that educators remain confident in their abilities even in challenging situations.

Another commendable feature of GRETA is its ability to foster connection and integration within the field of adult education. When adult educators undergo competence validation through GRETA, they not only receive recognition, but also gain access to a community of peers and professional networks that further support their growth. This interconnectedness reduces feelings of isolation, a common struggle for those working in unregulated educational spaces.

GRETA also contributes to a broader cultural shift in adult education by legitimising and professionalising the field. When educational institutions and employers recognise validated competencies, it strengthens the stability of the profession as a whole, offering more security and opportunities for those within it.

By legitimising skills, strengthening professional identity, and promoting reflective practice, GRETA serves as more than a validation tool—it becomes a catalyst for empowerment. As adult educators continue to navigate an evolving field, initiatives like GRETA offer a necessary foundation for both personal and collective resilience, ensuring that educators can thrive, not just survive, in their profession. During times of crisis, nurturing such foundation becomes especially crucial.

3 Andragogues and Communities of Practice in Times of Crisis

Katrin Karu, Cynne Põldäär and Halliki Põlda address a relevant issue in adult education: how andragogues (adult educators and facilitators of learning) can help individuals and communities cope with crises through Communities of Practice (CoPs). I hereby endorse the authors' general message that traditional learning models and existing educational cultures may no longer be sufficient in responding to the rapid, complex, and often disruptive changes affecting societies today. Collaborative, adaptive, and community-driven approaches, as the authors rightly argue, are needed to build resilience, maintain social cohesion, and foster professional development during times of uncertainty.

3.1 *The Necessity of Communities of Practice in Crisis Situations*

One of the chapter's key contributions is its recognition that crises disrupt not only economies and institutions, but also human connections. The authors point out that during crises, there is often a lack of interaction between people, which exacerbates social fragmentation and hinders collective problem-solving. This observation resonates strongly with the experiences of global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where isolation, misinformation, and fear contributed to weakened community ties and a sense of alienation.

The authors emphasise that Communities of Practice can help strengthen social relationships and a sense of belonging—two essential factors in coping with crises (Bolisani et al., 2020). This argument aligns with Wenger's (1998) foundational work on CoPs, which underscores the idea that learning is a social and situated process. Particularly in crisis situations, individuals need trusted spaces where they can exchange knowledge, reflect on experiences, and collectively develop solutions.

There are several documented examples illustrating how CoPs have been instrumental in crisis response and recovery. For example, during the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–2022), Medical and Healthcare CoPs (e.g., Project ECHO, WHO learning networks) played a vital role in disseminating critical information about COVID-19 treatment, vaccine development, and public health strategies, Educator CoPs (e.g., online teacher networks) helped teachers adapt to digital learning, share online teaching strategies, and support students in remote education, Mental Health and Well-being CoPs (e.g., online support groups) provided mental health resources, self-care strategies, and professional counselling to help individuals cope with pandemic-induced stress and anxiety.

CoPs formed around social justice issues, such as the #MeToo movement and Black Lives Matter, have transformed public discourse, provided support for marginalised groups, and influenced policies on gender-based violence and racial justice.

These examples demonstrate that CoPs are not only effective in crisis response, but also serve as catalysts for systemic change and long-term resilience-building.

3.2 *The Role of Andragogues as Facilitators of Community Learning*

The chapter makes an important claim: andragogues are uniquely positioned to lead and sustain CoPs during crises because they work in diverse contexts and with varied target groups. Andragogues are often responsible for facilitating learning processes that are participatory, inclusive, and reflective. Their

ability to navigate interdisciplinary knowledge, adult learning theories, and collaborative methodologies makes them ideal candidates to guide collective learning efforts.

The role of andragogues in crisis leadership is a complex and evolving one, requiring further probing in response to questions such as: What specific professional skills do andragogues need to successfully lead a CoP in a crisis? How should andragogues address power dynamics and inequalities within a community of practice?

One key area where this discussion could also be expanded is the potential ethical dilemmas that arise when leading a CoP during crises. Crises often create unequal access to resources and knowledge, leading to power imbalances within learning communities. Also, in cases where CoPs are not actively inclusive, certain voices may dominate discussions while others may be marginalised or excluded. For instance, during the pandemic, digital literacy gaps prevented many learners—particularly older adults and low-income groups—from fully participating in online CoPs. How should andragogues navigate these disparities to ensure equitable participation is a question that needs to be addressed.

3.3 *The Digitalisation of Communities of Practice: A Challenge for Andragogues*

With the rise of virtual learning, online forums, and digital collaboration tools, traditional CoPs have increasingly shifted to virtual spaces. While digital platforms offer new opportunities for global connectivity, they also present new challenges, such as maintaining the same level of trust, engagement and authenticity, and accessibility to learners with varying levels of technological proficiency.

What challenges do andragogues face when facilitating CoPs in digital or hybrid environments? This seemingly rhetorical question is particularly important in a world where digital learning ecosystems are now a permanent part of adult education. Andragogues need to keep developing strategies to facilitate virtual collaboration, mediate online conflicts, and ensure digital inclusivity.

4 Adult Educators' as Agents of Social Change and Active Citizenship

Koutoulianou and Gravani's chapter examines the identity construction of adult educators as active citizens with a social justice orientation. By focusing on volunteer educators at 'Odysseus' Solidarity School in Thessaloniki, Greece, the authors provide a situated exploration of how personal experiences,

ideology, and activism shape an educator's professional identity and pedagogical approach. Grounded in Critical Pedagogy and Freirean thought, the research illustrates how education can be a revolutionary act, empowering both educators and learners to challenge social injustices and actively participate in democratic life.

The chapter's focus on activist educators is particularly relevant given the current context of polycrisis—a term used by the authors to describe the interwoven crises of political, economic, social, health, and cultural instability. In such a landscape, the role of education extends beyond knowledge transmission to social transformation, a perspective echoed in Gounari's (2019) assertion that teaching itself can be an act of resistance.

4.1 *The Power of Personal and Collective Identity in Activist Education*

One of the chapter's significant insights is its argument that an educator's identity formation is deeply intertwined with life experiences, ideological influences, and social engagement. The research findings suggest that the educators at Odysseus Solidarity School did not arrive at their activism randomly, but rather through a progression of experiences, relationships, and ideological awakenings. This aligns with Freire's (1970) concept of conscientização, or critical consciousness—the process of developing an awareness of social injustices and taking action to address them.

By utilising a biographical research approach, the authors effectively highlight how an educator's past informs their present commitments. One area that could be further expanded is the emotional and psychological dimensions of activist identity formation: How do educators manage the emotional burden of activism, particularly in the face of systemic resistance or burnout? What challenges arise when personal ideology conflicts with institutional structures or public policy? Does the process of identity formation ever result in disillusionment, and if so, how do educators sustain their commitment?

These questions could deepen the analysis of how activist educators not only form, but sustain their identities over time.

4.2 *The Role of Critical Pedagogy*

The educators in the study create 'contexts of questioning' for their students, using newspaper articles and literary texts to stimulate discussions on public concerns. This approach aligns with Freire's (1970) problem-posing education model, in which learners are encouraged to critically analyse reality, recognise their own oppression, and take action to change it.

Critical pedagogy is a powerful framework for transformative education, but it also requires navigating tensions between empowerment and resistance.

Expanding on these practical considerations would provide a more nuanced understanding of how these ideas function in real-world adult education settings.

4.3 *The Risks and Ethical Challenges of Activist Teaching*

Teaching with a social justice orientation can be personally and professionally rewarding, but it also places educators in precarious positions—particularly in politically sensitive environments.

While the voluntary nature of Odysseus Solidarity School may shield educators from some institutional constraints, mainstream adult educators often face more restrictions when incorporating activism into their teaching. Addressing these contextual differences could broaden the applicability of the chapter's findings to a wider audience.

4.4 *Implications for Mainstream Adult Education and Institutional Change*

While this chapter effectively highlights the transformative potential of activist educators in informal educational spaces, an important question remains: how can these insights be applied to mainstream adult education?

The Odysseus Solidarity School operates within a voluntary, grassroots framework, which allows for greater pedagogical freedom and a strong social justice focus. However, most adult educators work within institutional settings—universities, vocational training centres, government programmes, or corporate training environments—where activism may not be easily integrated into curricula. Expanding the discussion to address how activist identity formation can navigate institutional constraints is of the essence.

4.5 *The Role of Emotions, Resilience, and Burnout in Activist Teaching*

One of the underexplored aspects of activist identity formation is the emotional and psychological toll it can take on educators. Teaching with a social justice orientation—particularly in crisis-affected communities—can be deeply emotionally taxing. Educators working with vulnerable populations, such as migrants or refugees, often encounter trauma, systemic oppression, and overwhelming socio-political challenges that can lead to burnout, frustration, or emotional exhaustion.

Incorporating reflections on self-care, emotional sustainability, and long-term resilience could provide a more holistic picture of activist educator identity formation. A discussion on mentorship, peer networks, and educator well-being would also add depth to the analysis, acknowledging that activism in education is not just about empowerment, but also about endurance and sustainability.

4.6 *The Broader Political and Global Context of Activist Education*

While the chapter focuses on the Greek context and the Odysseus Solidarity School, the themes explored—activist education, identity formation, and social justice—are highly relevant in global contexts. Across the world, adult educators face increasing political pressures, restrictions on academic freedom, and ideological polarisation: in authoritarian regimes, critical educators are often silenced, surveilled, or even criminalised for teaching topics related to democracy, human rights, or social activism; in liberal democracies, political polarisation can make discussions on social justice contentious, with educators facing pushback from administrations, policymakers, or learners; and the rise of populist and nationalist movements in various countries has also challenged the role of educators as facilitators of democratic dialogue.

The broader reach of activist education allows for comparative analysis, informed by questions, such as: How do activist educators navigate different political and cultural environments? What role do global movements (e.g., climate activism, feminist movements, anti-racism campaigns) play in shaping educator identity? How do international networks of activist educators share strategies and support each other?

By situating the discussion within a broader global context, such epistemological curiosities could offer more cross-cultural insights into the universality and variability of activist educator identity formation.

5 Crises and Professional Identity: Shaping, Not Just Shaking

The Chapter by Rannala, Jõgi and Jüristo is situated against a backdrop marked by two major crises, COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine. Both crises are characterised by the common themes of fear, adaptation and mental health issues. The three authors explore how such crises have influenced the social positions of educators and how adult educators and youth workers shaped and re-shaped social positions in their professional practice during the crises.

A *position* is not simply a static role, but rather a collection of beliefs, perspectives, and expectations that individuals hold about themselves and others in a social context. They influence how individuals perceive their own agency and how they relate to others within a specific setting. In an educational environment, the roles adopted by both adult educators and learners extend far beyond formal designations, they shape the very nature of teaching, learning, and interaction. Adult educators may position themselves as "mentors" or "facilitators", emphasising guidance, critical thinking, and collaborative knowledge-building rather than traditional instruction. In contrast, adult learners

may take on different positionalities based on their own perceptions of learning, seeing themselves as "active learners" who engage critically with content, contribute insights, and take responsibility for their educational journey, or conversely, as "passive recipients of knowledge" who rely on the educator to deliver information in a structured and prescriptive manner.

These roles, however, are not merely externally imposed or dictated by the learning structure. They are deeply internalised through belief systems, prior educational experiences, cultural expectations, and personal dispositions. An educator who views their role as a mentor may foster a learning environment that encourages independence and exploration, reinforcing a more participatory and engaged learning culture. Conversely, an adult learner who has been conditioned to see learning as a process of absorbing pre-packaged knowledge may struggle to transition into a more active role, requiring shifts in mindset and pedagogical approach.

The dynamic nature of these positions highlights the complex interplay between identity, power, and agency in adult education. When both educators and participants reflect on and consciously shape their roles, they contribute to a more effective and transformative learning experience, one that empowers learners to not only acquire knowledge, but also develop critical autonomy, self-efficacy, and lifelong learning skills.

Positioning, is therefore a more fluid and interactive process than simply holding a position. It refers to how individuals actively accept, negotiate, or challenge the roles and expectations assigned to them. Positioning is an ongoing process where individuals construct their identities in relation to others; people do not simply inherit fixed social roles, but engage in a continuous process of negotiation. For example, a youth worker may initially be positioned as an "authority figure", but could actively reposition themselves as a "peer guide" by altering their language, behaviour, and engagement with young people.

In addition, McVee (2011) asserts that in any given social setting, multiple potential positions exist. This means that social interactions are not rigidly defined, but are instead open to reinterpretation, negotiation, renegotiation and change. Individuals may hold multiple positions simultaneously or shift between them depending on the context. For instance, in a crisis situation, an adult educator might move between different positions—acting as a "supporter" for struggling students, a "leader" in policy adaptation, or a "collaborator" when working with peers. These shifting positions illustrate how professional identity is constructed dynamically rather than being a fixed attribute.

5.1 *Implications for Education and Social Practices*

Understanding position and positioning is crucial in fields like adult education and youth work, as it highlights the fluid and constructed nature of social

identities. In times of crisis, for example, individuals may be forced to reposition themselves quickly, adjusting their beliefs and behaviours to align with new challenges.

This concept also underscores the power dynamics inherent in social interactions. Some positions may be imposed by dominant social structures, while others may be actively resisted or redefined. Recognising this dynamic process allows adult educators and youth workers to be more intentional in shaping inclusive and responsive social environments.

Rannala, Jõgi, and Jüristo confirm the accumulated wisdom around positions on examining how crises reshape the social positions of educators and youth workers, emphasising their agency in adapting and redefining their roles. Grounded in social constructionism, the study highlights the intricate interplay between external pressures and internal professional recalibrations, demonstrating that professional identities do not merely shift in response to crises, but often crystallise and strengthen.

The research offers a structured framework for analysing the evolving professional identities of educators. Rather than viewing educators as passive responders to crisis conditions, the findings underscore educators' proactive engagement in reshaping their professional landscape, aligning them with the evolving demands of their practice.

The central message of the foregoing chapter aligns with broader sociological understandings that periods of instability often lead to a heightened awareness of professional roles and a reassertion of authority or responsibility.

For example, the three authors refer to Pierre Bourdieu. The French sociologist's (1984) work on social fields and positions suggests that crises and periods of instability often lead to a renegotiation of social positions, reinforcing or redefining authority within a given field. His theory of habitus, capital, and field dynamics provides a framework for understanding how professional roles are reinforced or adjusted in response to external pressures. Also, Ulrich Beck (1992) discusses how modern societies respond to crises and uncertainty, often leading to a heightened awareness of roles, responsibilities, and authority structures

However, while the chapter suggests resilience and adaptability, it also raises critical questions: Do these strengthened positions empower educators, or do they entrench existing hierarchies? Are these adjustments temporary, or do they lead to lasting transformations in educational practice?

Ultimately, this chapter makes an important contribution to the discourse on both adult and youth education by demonstrating how crises serve as pivotal moments in shaping and redefining professional identity. It underscores the way external disruptions—whether economic, political, social, or institutional—act as catalysts that force educators and learners alike to reassess their

roles, values, and trajectories within the educational landscape. In doing so, the chapter brings to light the transformative potential of crisis, not just as an obstacle, but as a space for critical reflection, growth, and reinvention.

Central to this discussion is the role of reflexivity, where individuals actively interrogate their experiences, re-evaluate their assumptions, and adapt their practices in response to shifting realities. The ability to adapt—whether by modifying pedagogical approaches, restructuring institutional roles, or engaging with new educational technologies—becomes essential for maintaining relevance and effectiveness in an evolving landscape. Moreover, the chapter emphasises the concept of agency, highlighting how individuals and institutions do not passively endure crises, but instead navigate them through deliberate action, negotiation, and recalibration of their professional and social positions.

By illustrating these dynamics, this chapter deepens our understanding of the ways in which crises are not merely disruptive forces, but also opportunities for professional identity development, innovation, and social transformation within adult and youth education.

6 The Professionalisation of Adult Educators in Slovenia in the Face of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The professionalisation of adult educators is a complex and dynamic process influenced by various socio-economic, cultural, and political factors. As highlighted by Borut Mikulec, adult education is inherently tied to a country's social fabric, which shapes the structure and regulation of its AE systems. In Slovenia, similar to other countries examined in this volume, AE professionals come from diverse backgrounds, with many lacking formal preparation in key areas such as teaching methodologies, counselling, and programme planning. This diversity, while enriching, presents significant challenges for standardising professional competencies and ensuring consistent quality in adult education delivery.

What stands out is the fragmented nature of training opportunities for adult educators, coupled with the precarious job status many face. This precariousness undermines the development of a robust professional identity among AEs, which is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging, purpose, and commitment to the field. The lack of formal pathways and recognition not only affects individual educators, but also impacts the broader perception and legitimacy of adult education as a vital component of lifelong learning systems.

6.1 *The Multi-level Perspective on Professionalisation*

Mikulec's chapter emphasises a multi-level perspective on professionalisation, considering the interdependencies between the macro (state-society), meso (organisational), and micro (individual) levels. This framework is critical in understanding how policies, institutional practices, and personal competencies interact to shape the professional landscape of adult education.

At the macro level, state policies and national regulations play a pivotal role in defining professional standards, funding mechanisms, and support structures. However, as the chapter suggests, there has been insufficient attention to how state-level interventions (or the lack thereof) affect the professional development of AEs. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated these gaps, revealing the fragile nature of institutional support for adult educators during crises.

At the meso level, organisations are key actors in providing professional development opportunities, fostering communities of practice, and supporting educators in adapting to changing demands. The chapter's findings indicate that during the pandemic, much of the support that AEs received came from their respective organisations rather than from state initiatives. This organisational resilience highlights the importance of strong institutional leadership and the need for flexible, adaptive professional development frameworks within AE providers.

At the micro level, individual educators' competencies, motivations, and identities are shaped by both their personal experiences and the systemic contexts in which they operate. The pandemic underscored the critical need for digital literacy and pedagogical adaptability, with many educators recognising information and communication technology (ICT) competencies and distance education didactics as essential components of their professional toolkit. This shift calls for a redefinition of professional competence in AE to include digital fluency as a core skill, alongside traditional pedagogical and counselling abilities.

6.2 *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Adult Education in Slovenia*

The COVID-19 pandemic was a watershed moment for education systems globally, and Slovenia was no exception. The sudden shift to online and distance learning formats posed existential challenges for many AE organisations and professionals. The lack of adequate support from the state during this period, as highlighted in the chapter, reflects broader systemic vulnerabilities in the AE sector.

The pandemic highlighted several critical issues:

1. Digital Divide: The rapid transition to online learning exposed inequalities in digital access and competencies among educators and learners alike. Adult educators had to quickly adapt to new technologies, often without sufficient training or resources, exacerbating stress and professional burnout.
2. Organisational Resilience: Despite limited state support, many AE organisations demonstrated remarkable resilience, providing training, resources, and peer support networks to help educators navigate the new landscape. This underscores the importance of strong institutional cultures that prioritise continuous learning and professional development.
3. Redefinition of Professionalism: The crisis forced a re-evaluation of what it means to be a professional in adult education. Traditional markers of professionalism, such as classroom management and face-to-face instructional skills, were supplemented (if not overshadowed) by the need for digital pedagogical competencies.
4. Mental Health and Well-being: The pandemic also brought to the forefront issues related to mental health and well-being among educators. The stress of adapting to new modes of teaching, coupled with job insecurity and isolation, had profound effects on the professional and personal lives of AEs.

6.3 *Rethinking Professional Development in Adult Education*

The insights from Mikulec's chapter suggest that professional development in AE needs to be reimagined to address both current challenges and future uncertainties. A fewkeyareasemerge as priorities:

1. Integrated Professional Development Frameworks: There is a need for comprehensive professional development models that integrate digital competencies, pedagogical innovation, and emotional resilience. These frameworks should be supported at both the national and organisational levels.
2. Policy Support and Advocacy: Stronger advocacy is needed to ensure that AE is recognised as a critical sector within national education policies. This includes securing funding, establishing professional standards, and creating pathways for career progression and recognition.
3. Community Building: Professional identity in AE can be strengthened through communities of practice that facilitate peer learning, mentorship, and collaborative problem-solving. Such networks can provide both professional support and a sense of belonging.

4. Focus on Equity: Professionalisation efforts must also address issues of equity, ensuring that all educators, regardless of their background or employment status, have access to quality professional development opportunities.

The COVID-19 pandemic acted as both a stress test and a catalyst for change, exposing systemic weaknesses while also underscoring the resilience and adaptability of educators and organisations.

Moving forward, there is an urgent need to develop holistic, multi-level strategies that support the professional growth of adult educators. This involves not only enhancing individual competencies, but also creating supportive organisational cultures and robust policy environments. Ultimately, the professionalisation of AE is not just about improving educational outcomes; it is about empowering educators to thrive in an ever-changing world, fostering lifelong learning, and contributing to more resilient, equitable societies.

7 Global Citizenship Education and the Moral Imperative of Adult Educators

Stephen O'Brien's chapter presents a compelling argument about the role of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in shaping the professional development of adult educators. His discussion is rooted in the recognition of 'disruptive change', a term used to encapsulate the existential threats facing our world, including climate crises, social inequalities, forced migration, and identity-based discrimination. His emphasis on interconnectedness and the moral imperative of adult educators to engage with these issues is persuasive, timely and relevant

O'Brien's broad framing of crises—from climate change to social injustice—demonstrates an awareness of the multifaceted challenges facing contemporary societies. This wide lens strengthens his argument that adult educators must adopt a global, justice-oriented perspective.

The chapter effectively highlights the moral and ethical responsibilities of adult educators, not just in teaching, but in their personal and professional identities. The emphasis on educators' interconnectedness with marginalised groups reinforces the idea that education is inherently political and that educators must engage in critical self-reflection about their roles in upholding or challenging systemic inequality.

By positioning Global Citizenship Education (GCE) as a foundational framework for adult educators, O'Brien aligns his discussion with progressive and

transformative education theories. The core principles of GCE—social justice, equality, and sustainability—are particularly relevant for adult learners, many of whom may already be engaged in social activism, community work, or policy advocacy. The argument that adult educators must not only teach these values, but also embody them in their practice is a critical takeaway, reinforcing the idea that education is not just about knowledge transmission, but about fostering ethical and engaged global citizens.

From my standpoint, one of the most compelling reads into the chapter is its direct challenge to adult educators: "Who are you, and what do you stand for?" This direst approach should push adult educators beyond theoretical abstraction, urging them to critically reflect on their own positionality, in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. By framing self-reflection as an essential component of teaching practice, O'Brien encourages educators to examine how their values and beliefs shape their pedagogical choices and interactions with learners.

While the chapter's broad definition of 'disruptive change' effectively situates adult education within a global crisis context, it also invites further exploration of how multiple crises—economic, political, environmental, and social—intersect with adult education practices in different settings. For instance, how do adult educators working in marginalised urban communities experience these crises compared to those in higher education institutions or corporate training environments? A more nuanced discussion of these diverse realities would strengthen the argument by acknowledging the varying challenges and opportunities educators face across different contexts.

It is evident that GCE promotes critical pedagogy, participatory learning, and engagement with social justice issues. However, to fully translate these ideals into practice, educators must grapple with a range of pedagogical challenges. For instance, how can GCE principles be effectively integrated into online learning environments? How do power dynamics unfold in classrooms where adult learners hold opposing political or ideological views? What role do experiential learning and community engagement play in embedding GCE values in adult education? Addressing such questions could further enrich the discussion by grounding it in specific andragogical strategies.

While O'Brien makes a compelling case for GCE and the role of adult educators in fostering critical awareness, structural constraints often hinder transformative educational practices. Government policies, economic constraints, and institutional bureaucracy can significantly limit educators' ability to enact meaningful change. Acknowledging these barriers and exploring ways to navigate them would add a layer of realism to the discussion, ensuring that the call to action remains both inspiring and actionable.

8 Andragogues' Professional Standards in a Country at War

Olena Anishchenko and Nataliya Avshenyuk delve into the professionalisation of adult educators within the turbulent socio-political context of Ukraine. They examine the development and significance of a standardised professional framework for andragogues, particularly in light of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war and the impending legislative changes under the draft law "On Adult Education". This is a work that explores the intersections of political instability, educational reform, and the evolving role of adult educators in Ukraine.

8.1 *The Need for Standardisation Amid Instability*

The urgency to professionalise the andragogues' role arises from Ukraine's unique challenges—most notably, the instability and uncertainty brought on by the aforementioned geopolitical conflict. The Russian-Ukrainian war has significantly disrupted all facets of Ukrainian society, including the education sector. In such contexts, adult education becomes a critical tool not only for lifelong learning, but also for societal resilience, reconstruction, and the promotion of social justice and democratic values.

The authors underscore the importance of establishing a professional standard as a stabilising force within this volatile environment. While on one hand the dogmatic observation of standardised expectations may stifle inclusivity, on the other hand standardisation provides clarity regarding the competencies, roles, and expectations for adult educators, fostering professional identity and coherence within the field. It also helps ensure the quality and relevance of adult education, particularly as the demand for diverse educational services will continue to grow in response to the war's socio-economic, emotional and psychological impacts.

8.2 *Legislative Context: The Draft Law "On Adult Education"*

The development of the andragogue professional standard is closely tied to the draft law "On Adult Education", which signals a legislative commitment to strengthening adult education in Ukraine. Such framework is to be applauded since it aims to formalise the status of adult educators, define their roles, and set clear guidelines for their training and professional development; a commendable achievement that many countries still have to come to terms with.

Politically, the approval of this draft law represents a significant step toward aligning Ukraine's adult education system with European standards, reflecting the country's broader aspirations for integration into the European educational space. By institutionalising adult education through legal reforms,

Ukraine seeks to enhance the sector's legitimacy, attract qualified professionals, and promote lifelong learning as a cornerstone of national development.

8.3 *The Expanding Role of Andragogues in Wartime*

The Russian-Ukrainian war has dramatically altered the landscape of adult education, necessitating a re-evaluation of the andragogue's role. Adult educators are called to adapt to new educational demands shaped by the war.

Many adult learners as well as educators are affected by trauma, displacement, and loss. Such a situation calls for andragogues come together as support groups and be equipped with skills to provide psychosocial support and create safe, inclusive learning environments.

Also, in times of conflict, adult education could play a vital role in promoting civic engagement, democratic values, and critical thinking. Andragogues are instrumental in fostering resilience and active citizenship among adult learners.

The war has exacerbated disparities in access to education.In such a context Andragogues are called to develop flexible, adaptive teaching strategies to reach diverse learner populations, including displaced persons, veterans, and individuals in occupied territories.

The ability to respond to rapidly changing circumstances is essential. Andragogues must cultivate competencies in crisis management, problem-solving, and continuous professional development to remain effective in dynamic contexts.

8.4 *Professional Identity and Career Development*

Professional identity is not static; it evolves through reflective practice, engagement with professional communities, and responses to societal changes. In Ukraine, the war has accelerated this evolution, compelling andragogues to redefine their mission and values. The professional standard serves as both a foundation and a roadmap, helping educators navigate these shifts while maintaining a clear sense of purpose and direction.

Career growth is another critical aspect addressed by the authors. The professional standard outlines pathways for professional advancement, including opportunities for specialisation, leadership roles, and participation in policy-making processes. This formalisation not only enhances individual career prospects, but also strengthens the overall capacity and credibility of the adult education sector.

The draft standard also addresses the mechanisms for assessment and certification, ensuring that andragogues meet established criteria before entering or advancing within the profession. This approach aligns with international

best practices, promoting transparency, accountability, and quality assurance in adult education.

The chapter provides us with a stark reminder that the drawing up of standards and their implementation may be miles apart. Implementation barriers may range from resource constraints and administrative hurdles to resistance to change. Also, given Ukraine's diverse regions and populations, contextual adaptation calls for flexibility to accommodate local contexts while maintaining national coherence. In addition, Ongoing conflict poses logistical and psychological challenges for educators and learners alike, potentially affecting the standard's rollout and uptake. Moreover, as Ukraine seeks to align with European educational frameworks, balancing international standards with local needs and realities remains a complex task.

9 Forming Adult Educators—Insights from a Small State

Maria Brown's contribution to the book zooms inon a Bachelor's (Honours) Degree in Adult Education, Training, and Development, a part-time, evening, hybrid course. The case study provides food for thought on the intersection of academic curriculum design and real-world professional development, acknowledging that institutional practices can either support or hinder adult learners, many of whom juggle multiple roles related to work, family, and personal development.

Brown's work identifies practices that support sustainable student participation, investigating the role of curriculum and teaching practices in fostering the professionalisation of prospective adult educators, particularly in light of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The theoretical framework adopted by the author, a conversation between genuine learner- centredness and emancipatory learning, reinforces the transformative mantra that curriculum development is much more than a technical act. Against such a backdrop, adult curriculum facilitators should be able to engage critically with the broader socio-political structures that influence adult education, especially in times of crisis. In practice, this translates into the realisation that sustainable participation depends on more than just course design—it requires a holistic understanding of the adult learners' life context.

For an authentic learner-centred curricular approach to happen and become sustainable, prescription and transmission cannot dominate the curricular experience. The latter approach deprives the adult learners of a voice and opens the way for a culture of curricular silence characterised by passivity and potential uncritical assimilation of centrally-prescribed content.

Emancipatory learning, the theoretical framework adopted by Brown as a viable signpost for doing curriculum for adult professional growth, encourages students to question and challenge traditional power dynamics within educational structures. It also promotes educational practices that centre the learner's needs, experiences, and active participation. Additionally, it recognises that both educators and institutions must be prepared to adopt and support learner-driven approaches.

While health and family challenges as well as work-related pressures emerged as powerful pushbacks to the sustainability of part-time, initiatives in the professionalisation of adult educators, two important takeaways from Brown's study, in line with student-centredness, where adults appreciate having control over their learning pathways, include:

1. Alignment with Professional and Personal Aspirations: Students were more engaged when the course content resonated with their career goals and personal development objectives.
2. Flexibility and Autonomy: Opportunities for decision-making regarding course resources, lecture modalities (e.g., hybrid learning), and timeframes were crucial for sustaining participation.

9.1 *The Role of Adult Educators as Agents of Change*

As indicated above, while learner-centredness as a prominent feature in curriculum design contributes significantly to sustainability through positive retention, a learner-centred approach, infused with an emancipatory agenda, positions prospective adult educators as catalysts for systemic change in adult and lifelong education. This transformative potential can manifest itself in two major ways:

1. Reforming the Status of Adult Educators: Through professionalisation, adult educators can advocate for better working conditions, recognition, and institutional support.
2. Emancipatory Change: Educators trained under critical and learner-centred paradigms are equipped to challenge traditional norms and promote inclusive, equitable learning environments.

Such an agenda in the professionalisation of adult educators is contingent on systemic factors, including:

1. Institutional Commitment: Higher education institutions must actively support professional development through resources, policy changes, and structural reforms.
2. Stakeholder Engagement: Broader stakeholder involvement (e.g., policymakers, employers, community organisations) is crucial to creating an ecosystem that values and supports adult education as a vital sector.

9.2 *The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis*

The COVID-19 pandemic serves as both a backdrop and a catalyst in Brown's analysis. As with other chapters in this book, the foregoing case study highlights three important aspects of a sector operating in acute crisis situation:

1. Acceleration of Digital Learning: The shift towards hybrid and online formats highlighted the need for digital competencies among both educators and learners.
2. Increased Need for Flexibility: The pandemic underscored the importance of flexible learning models, not just as a temporary measure, but as a permanent feature of adult education.
3. Resilience and Adaptability: The crisis tested the resilience of both students and institutions, revealing gaps in support structures, but also opportunities for innovation and growth.

This context reinforces the argument that professionalisation cannot be static; it must be dynamic and responsive to evolving global challenges.

9.3 *Implications for Policy and Practice*

Based on the findings, several key recommendations emerge. Firstly, Integrated Professional Development: Institutions should offer ongoing professional development opportunities that address both academic and practical skills, including digital literacy, pedagogical strategies, and emotional resilience. Secondly, creating flexible learning pathways, providing mental health support, and recognising the diverse needs of adult learners are essential for sustainable participation. Finally, national and institutional policies must support the professionalisation of adult educators through funding, recognition frameworks, and pathways for career progression.

10 Resilience at Work—Adult Educators in Greece in Viral Times

Anna Anastasopoulou and Maria Santa's specific focus on adult educators in Greece provides a unique lens, as adult education often operates under different structural, pedagogical, and resource conditions compared to mainstream K-12 or higher education sectors.

The framing immediately highlights the sudden shift from face-to-face to online teaching, a universal challenge faced during the pandemic. However, the study's value lies in moving beyond simply documenting this shift to examining how educators adapted specifically through the lens of resilience.

The authors adopt a multi-theoretical framework, drawing from systems theory, social ecology and critical realism. By combining these theories, the

study provides a nuanced, multi-layered understanding of resilience. It challenges deficit-oriented views that place the burden solely on educators to adapt, instead highlighting the systemic factors that shape their responses.

The study generated significant findings, all with relevant implications to adult education. These include:

1. Macro-System Conditions Shape Adaptability: Factors such as precarious employment and limited digital infrastructure significantly influenced educators' ability to adapt. This highlights how systemic inequalities and structural vulnerabilities, already present before the pandemic, were exacerbated during the crisis. For adult educators, who often work under short-term contracts with limited institutional support, these issues were particularly pronounced.
2. The Role of Micro- and Exo-System Resources: The study finds that collaborative efforts within professional micro-systems (e.g., peer support, school communities) and the strategic use of exo-system resources (e.g., social media networks) were critical in fostering resilience. This suggests that resilience is not just an individual attribute, but a collective, relational process. Social media, in particular, emerged as an unexpected yet powerful tool for professional development, resource sharing, and emotional support.
3. Transformative Approaches Foster Sustainable Practices: Interestingly, the study notes that transformative teaching methods—such as creative, workshop-based approaches—were more effective in creating sustainable educational practices than attempts to replicate pre-pandemic classroom norms. This finding challenges the common narrative that resilience is about "returning to normal". Instead, it suggests that true resilience involves rethinking and reimagining educational practices to fit new realities.

This study makes several important contributions, offering a blueprint for building more resilient, adaptive, and equitable educational systems in the future:

1. Reconceptualizing Resilience: By framing resilience as a dynamic, interconnected process rather than an individual trait, the study aligns with contemporary critiques of resilience discourse. It shifts the focus from personal grit to the structural conditions and social relationships that enable adaptive responses.
2. Policy Implications: The study offers insights that could inform policy responses aimed at bolstering resilience in adult education. For example, investing in digital infrastructure, supporting stable employment

conditions for educators, and fostering professional learning communities could significantly enhance system-wide resilience.

3. Innovative Pedagogical Practices: The emphasis on transformative, creative approaches suggests that crises can be opportunities for pedagogical innovation. Rather than striving to "get back to normal", educators and policymakers should consider how to embed flexible, student-centred practices that can thrive in both stable and disrupted contexts.

11 Sudden Transitioning into the Virtual Classroom. Lessons from Cyprus

The chapter by Eleni Papaioannou offers a contribution to the growing body of literature on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, specifically focusing on adult educators in a second chance school in Cyprus. By examining the abrupt shift from face-to-face to online education, the chapter not only documents the challenges faced by educators, but also provides valuable insights into the transformative potential of such a crisis. Its focus on adult education, often underrepresented in mainstream educational research, further enhances its contribution to the field.

One of the most compelling contributions of the chapter is its rich, qualitative exploration of adult educators' personal experiences during the pandemic. Through in-depth interviews, the study captures the emotional, cognitive, and professional struggles that accompanied the sudden transition to online teaching. This focus on the educators' voices allows for a nuanced understanding of how individuals navigated feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and even professional inadequacy in the face of unprecedented challenges.

Unlike studies that focus solely on student outcomes or technological solutions, this chapter places educators at the centre, highlighting their emotional labour, adaptability, and resilience. By doing so, it humanises the pandemic's impact on education and provides a deeper appreciation of the complexities involved in teaching adults in times of crisis.

The use of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) is particularly insightful. TLT suggests that transformative learning occurs when individuals experience disorienting dilemmas that challenge their existing frames of reference. The pandemic undoubtedly served as such a dilemma, forcing educators to reassess their pedagogical assumptions, technological competencies, and professional identities. The chapter effectively demonstrates how, despite initial resistance or discomfort, many educators underwent a process of critical reflection that

led to personal and professional growth. This aligns with the transformative learning cycle of experiencing, reflecting, and adapting.

In addition, Critical Theory enriches the analysis by exposing systemic inequalities and structural barriers that were exacerbated during the shift to online learning. The chapter moves beyond individual experiences to critique the broader educational ecosystem, including inadequate digital infrastructure, lack of institutional support, and policy gaps. This dual-theoretical approach not only deepens the analysis, butalso bridges the micro (personal experiences) and macro (systemic issues) levels, offering a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in adult education.

Second chance education caters to learners who have previously disengaged from formal education, often due to socio-economic barriers, learning difficulties, or personal circumstances. The chapter's focus on this context is a critical contribution because it reveals how the pandemic disproportionately affected already vulnerable populations. Challenges such as learner disengagement, digital divides, and limited self-directed learning skills are magnified in second chance settings.

The findings underscore that online education, in its current form, may not fully meet the needs of these learners unless tailored interventions are implemented. This raises important questions about equity in education and the risk of further marginalising those who rely on second chance programmes as a pathway to personal and professional development.

While much of the discourse around COVID-19 and education focuses on its disruptive impact, this chapter sheds light on the transformational potential of crisis. The pandemic forced educators to step outside their comfort zones, develop new digital competencies, and reimagine their teaching practices. Some educators reported a shift in their professional self-image, moving from seeing themselves solely as content deliverers to becoming facilitators of learning in diverse environments.

This transformation is not just about acquiring technical skills, but also about embracing new pedagogical philosophies, such as learner autonomy, flexible learning environments, and the integration of technology to enhance—not just replicate—traditional classroom experiences. By documenting these shifts, the chapter contributes to the growing recognition of crisis as a catalyst for educational innovation.

The inclusion of policy analysis alongside qualitative interviews strengthens the chapter's contribution by connecting individual experiences to broader institutional and systemic contexts. The analysis of policy documents and circulars reveals gaps between policy intentions and the realities on the ground. For example, while policies may have advocated for a seamless transition to

online learning, the lack of infrastructure, professional development, and support mechanisms rendered these policies ineffective in practice.

This finding has significant implications for educational policymakers. It highlights the need for crisis-responsive policies that are flexible, context-specific, and grounded in the lived realities of educators and learners. Moreover, it calls for long-term investments in digital infrastructure, continuous professional development, and support systems that can withstand future disruptions.

In summary, the chapter makes a significant contribution to the literature on adult education during times of crisis. Its strengths lie in its rich qualitative data, robust theoretical framework, and focus on the unique context of second chance education. By documenting the emotional, professional, and systemic dimensions of the transition to online learning, the chapter provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers alike. Moreover, it challenges the notion of the pandemic as purely a disruptive force, instead framing it as an opportunity for critical reflection, professional transformation, and systemic reform. As educational systems worldwide continue to grapple with the long-term effects of COVID-19, studies like this offer crucial lessons on resilience, adaptability, and the urgent need to address structural inequities in education.

12 Conclusion

As this volume has demonstrated, adult educators operate at the crossroads of profound societal shifts, responding to crises, embracing digital transformations, and advocating for social change. Their role extends far beyond the facilitation of knowledge; they are key agents in fostering resilience, critical consciousness, and inclusive learning environments. The collective insights presented in these chapters underscore the urgency of professionalising adult education, not as a bureaucratic exercise, but as a means of legitimising and strengthening the field, ensuring its sustainability, and enhancing its impact on learners and communities alike.

Amidst political, economic, and technological disruptions, adult educators must continually redefine their professional identities, balancing adaptability with principled engagement. The chapters have illustrated that resilience is not merely an individual trait, but a systemic imperative—one that is cultivated through structured validation mechanisms, robust professional networks, and supportive institutional frameworks.

Equally significant is the recognition that adult education is inherently political. Educators must navigate ideological tensions, institutional constraints,

and evolving learner needs. The findings reinforce the necessity of critical pedagogy and reflexive practice, urging educators to interrogate their roles within the broader social fabric and to challenge structural inequities wherever they emerge.

Looking ahead, the future of adult education hinges on the ability of educators, institutions, and policymakers to work in concert toward a more just and sustainable educational landscape. This requires a commitment to ongoing professional development, equitable policy frameworks, and an unwavering dedication to education as a force for empowerment. The path forward is not without challenges, but as the experiences captured in this volume illustrate, adult educators have the capacity to not only endure, but also reshape the world in which they teach, learn, and inspire.

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Subject and Author Index

RESEARCH ON THE EDUCATION AND LEARNING OF ADULTS

Adult Educators in the Face of Crises in Europe

Managing Challenges, Shaping Identities and Changing Cultures

Larissa Jõgi, George K. Zarifis, Susanne Lattke and Maria N. Gravani (Eds.)

This book explores the evolving identities, practices and challenges faced by adult educators across Europe in the context of recent crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and economic and social upheavals. These events have reshaped the educational landscape, disrupted adult learning and demanded rapid adjustments from adult educators. The book examines how these crises impact educators' identities, agency and professional practice, particularly considering the precarious working conditions many face. Through empirical studies and theoretical reflections, the book investigates how adult educators navigate these turbulent times, addressing identity formation, professionalisation and adaptation, while highlighting the ethical and social dimensions of their work.

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