An Analysis and Critique of U. S. Adult and Workforce Education Policy in a Historical Perspective

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Abstract

It is essential to cultivate a more nuanced understanding of the federal level policies that established Adult and Workforce Education (AWE) as we currently know it. Looking at the governance structures and codified values regarding the education of adults in the form of legislation and federal policy helps us more accurately ascertain the relationship between institutional arrangements and nationally valued educational ends. Examining national-level policy through a historical lens to more recent developments provides deeper insight into and sheds light on the current climate for public AWE programming. Our aim for this article is to present an overview and *précis* of our historical analysis pertaining to the AWE policy domain in the United States, with emphasis on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, for a broader international audience.

Keywords: Adult education, workforce training, federal policy, United States

1 Introduction

Scholarship regarding United States educational policy intended to establish and develop public programming to support learning in adulthood has waxed and waned over the decades. A few historical overviews exist (ED, 2013; Eyre, 2013; Stubblefield & Keane, 1994), and various critical analyses emerged investigating the philosophical underpinnings of educational programming for adults (Amstutz, 2001; Amstutz & Sheared, 2000; Belzer, 2003; Hill, 2010; Milana & McBain, 2015; Mortrude, 2018; Rose, 1994, 1999) as a response to various pieces of legislation that brought substantial changes to the sector. Only within the last decade have detailed reviews of the legislative documents and systematic examinations of the evolution of policy and systems become available (Belzer, 2017; Brown & Holcomb, 2018; Cushing, Therriault, & English, 2017; Jacobson, 2017; Pickard, 2019). More recently, there has also been a flurry of interest across international literature pertaining to policy development, adult education, and lifelong learning (e. g., Elfert & Walker, 2020; Milana, Klatt, & Tronca, 2020; Palumbo & Pandolfini, 2019; Roumell & Roessger, 2019; Tuparevska,

Santibáñez, & Solabarrieta, 2020; UNESCO, 2009). What has been clear in the U. S. literature on adult and workforce education (AWE) policy is that there is no real consensus on the nature, function, and scope of public educational programming for adults (Roumell, Salajan, & Todoran, 2020). Therefore, the purpose of this particular exegesis will be to present a limited overview and *précis* of the analyses we have conducted over the past five years pertaining to the AWE policy domain in the U. S., with emphasis on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, for a broader international audience.[1]

2 Background

It is essential to cultivate a more nuanced understanding of the federal-level policies that establish adult and workforce education as we currently know it. Looking at the governance structures and codified values regarding the education of adults in the form of legislation and federal policy helps us more accurately to ascertain the relationship between institutional arrangements and nationally valued educational ends. Examining national-level policy and recent WIOA 2014 developments provides deeper insight into, and sheds light on, the current climate for public adult educational programming in the U. S.

The official origin story of the field of adult education in the U. S. is often pinpointed at the passing of the federal-level Adult Education Act (AEA) of 1966 (see the list of legislation in Table 1), although programming and other initiatives existed at the state level across the country, and other forms of education and training for adults had already been in existence for at least a century prior to AEA. Long before AEA, the federal Morrill Act of 1862 was the genesis of land-grant universities in the U. S., which established public institutions in each state with the purpose of providing educational opportunities to people in professions that were considered "practical" at the time. The Morrill Act underscored the establishment of "Extension Services" in the form of continuing and outreach education, which became one of the core functions of U. S. public, state universities.

These public, educational outreach programs were intended to disseminate innovative information and techniques for agriculture and industry in order to promote economic and social development across the great expanses of the country. These "outreach" schools often consisted of agriculture experimental stations, and other forms of education and training to support the continued economic, agricul-

1 For a historical overview of Adult and Workforce Education (AWE) policy, see Roumell, E. A., Salajan, F. D., & Todoran, C. (2020). A survey of U. S. education policy regarding the education of adults. *Educational Policy*. doi:10.1177/0895904818802416.
For an overview of AWE policy development over time applying a systematic policy framework, see Roumell, E. A., Salajan, F. D., & Todoran, C. (2019). An analysis and illustration of the U. S. adult and workforce education policy domain. *Adult Education Quarterly*. doi: 10.1177/0741713619856097.
For a detailed description of the framework applied, see Roumell, E. A. (accepted). A framework for capacity building in adult and workforce education programming. *Adult Literacy Education: The International Journal of Literacy, Language, and Numeracy*.

tural, industrial, and social development, and to help stabilize the varying levels of development between states. In establishing this sort of publicly funded training and education from the federal/national level, a model for providing opportunities for advancement and learning in support of national interests and economic improvement emerged. Even as funding streams, national aims, purposes, and various approaches have been, this model of public, state-centered, federally incentivized programs established a foundational architecture for AWE education that remains today. From its origins, AWE policy in the U. S. has been framed in terms of supporting public education as an instrumental means in response to national economic and social demands.

We cannot offer encyclopedic coverage of the historical advancement of U. S. AWE policy within this allotted space, but we can offer a sketch of the current policyscape within the U. S. In order to do so, we will succinctly present the policy analysis framework we have developed in past work, the methodology we employed to examine AWE legislative documents, and will offer some highlights from our research findings.

3 Architecture of the AWE System

In the United States, educating children and adults is chiefly the responsibility of states and local governments under the principle of subsidiarity, with limited federal-level involvement or centralization (Schmidt, 2008). Federal attention to adult and continuing education mostly grew as a mechanism for supporting adults who were unable to complete basic compulsory schooling (Rose, 1999). In some ways, AWE policy has been more centralized than other educational domains in the U. S., as many of the initiatives originated at the federal level and have been funded by federal flow-through dollars. The first office of adult education was created as a branch of the federal Department of Education (ED). Today, the Division of Adult Education and Literacy falls under the direction of the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTEA) within the ED. And yet, at present, no fewer than five different federal agencies administer similar AWE services, making it difficult to ascertain an architecture or coherent strategy. Several federal agencies – e. g., the Departments of Education, Labor, Health and Human Services, Defense, and Justice – apportion funds and implement AWE services. This multiplicity of actors and purposes is reflected at all levels of the AWE polity.

The AWE policy arena is jointly constituted across various levels of governance (e. g., national, state, and local governments) with ideational input from the global community (i. e., education is a human right and essential for economic development). The national policies are often enacted in the name of international economic competition, but the scale of policy and implementation is actually quite localized (Belzer, 2003). Individual states partner with both the federal and local governments to implement educational programming for adults. Historically, the AWE stakehold-

ing community has been drawn from a range of political and bureaucratic institutions, including national government agencies and state departments, local educational authorities, national professional associations, training boards, trade unions, individual institutions including universities and colleges, the not-for-profit sector, faith, community, and other civil-society groups. Paradoxically, the plurality of actors involved in delivering programming locally creates an impression of a loosely-organized amalgamation of systems that appear to lack coordination and clarity in administration and execution.

The varying levels of each of the implementing systems are somewhat, but not entirely, autonomous. The vertical dimension of policy legislation is multiscalar and the movement of federal policies is top-down – from ideation as statutes down to their implementation when program managers and instructors act on them. Withal, states, providers, program managers, practitioners, staff and volunteers are not mere passive receivers of dictates. The horizontal, multi-institutional implementation process is also subject to various interpretations and applications, and must cater to a multiplicity of stakeholders. Each level of actors responds to and reshapes education initiatives based on the state, local community, program, and even classroom level context. All told, adult education programs in the U. S. are delivered by a diverse network of 3,500 to 4,000 service providers, including local school districts (over half), community colleges, volunteer literacy organizations, public housing authorities, public libraries, community and faith-based organizations, and other non-profits and private organizations.

4 Methods

4.1 Document Selection

In our original analysis, we examined U. S. legislative documents spanning the years 1862 to 2014 that served as the foundational architecture for the AWE polity and policy area. For analysis, we selected 22 key legislative documents that either initiated new public educational programming for adult populations, shifted the nature or focus of, or significantly altered public, adult educational programming. More specifically, we focused on public laws enacted by Congress, with power to enforce legal stipulations and provisions at federal level, and excluded rejected bill proposals, reports, or white papers.

In the U. S., adult and continuing education generally comprises adult literacy and education up to secondary-school levels, adult vocational training, and non-credit post-secondary schemes supported by federal programs (ED, 2008). Because adult educational programming in the U. S. is offered and regulated by no fewer than five different federal agencies, the variety of documents selected for review included legislation pertaining to workforce and job development; adult literacy and basic education (including English language learning, high school equivalency, and family literacy); various types of remediation and postsecondary preparation; vocational and

career and technical education; and higher education, among others. Prior to conducting our analyses, we also reviewed literature about AWE policy and documents published by the U. S. Department of Education (ED) about AWE history and policy to make sure our work was also properly historically situated (Roumell, Salajan, & Todoran, 2020). We selected and coded the textual content of 22 foundational federal legislative documents using a policy matrix made of nine policy dimensions we had developed in our previous work (Roumell Erichsen & Salajan, 2014) (see Table 2 in the appendix for the policy analysis framework).

4.2 Policy Analysis Framework

Our approach relied on two instruments combined in one analytical matrix, with policy functions arranged horizontally and policy facets arranged vertically (see Table 2). The policy functions were adapted from Mendez and Mendez's (2010) three-pronged policy analysis framework they utilized in their study on comparative federalism related to privacy regimes in the United States and the European Union. In this tri-partite framework, *policy framing* is construed as the ideational process through which institutional actors interpret external or internal threats to define a policy issue of importance for the polity they administer. Next, *policy dynamics* represents the interaction between the aforementioned actors and the roles designated to them in the course of carrying out policy decisions or actions. Finally, *policy instruments* are the concrete devices through which policy is implemented, ranging from discrete behavioral norms to financial provisions necessary to operationalize policy directives.

The policy facets in the vertical plane of our analytical matrix address aspects of provisions in broad policy areas related to adult education, ranging from the improvement of training programs or financing of such programming to the interaction between various actors with vested interests and to social implications of the policies enacted. These facets were informed in part by work on U. S. policy development conducted by McMillan Culp, Honey and Mandinach (2003) and by Brown, Anderson and Murray's (2007) analysis of global policy trends in e-learning. Furthermore, it should be noted that, for the purpose of the current analysis, we re-adapted some of the policy facets we initially employed in our comparative work on e-learning policy in the EU and the U. S. (see Roumell Erichsen and Salajan, 2014) to better reflect the particularities of adult education and vocational training policies.

4.3 Process and Procedures

A couple of distinct approaches can be taken when it comes to the content analysis of policy documents: inductive or deductive. An inductive approach, or one of context discovery, is where researchers explore textual content for broad patterns, themes, narratives, images, rhetoric, and qualitative characterizations in order to develop thorough descriptions or to generate new theories. For the purpose of our policy analyses we chose a context justification approach, which is a deductive approach that applies already established models or coding systems to selected content, to transform the data (Krippendorff, 2018). We assigned codes to each line of text in the

selected legislative documents and entered each of the codes into the analysis matrix shown in Table 2. We each parsed the policy documents separately, then reconciled our parallel attribution of codes through a dialogic process to establish the final location of each code in a merged matrix. Each code was thus placed at the intersection of a specific policy facet and a policy function. We then totaled the number of codes in each category as a representation of policy emphasis in each of the defined dimensions, allowing patterns of policy development to emerge over time.[2]

5 Policy Trends Over Time

As formulated by the federal and state governments, AWE policies have been political responses to events like the Great Depression, World War II, shifts in the economy, or the 2008 financial crisis. Additionally, cumulating data about general adult skill levels in the U. S. help refocus attention on the need for continuing education and training. Below we present an overview of the broader trends in AWE policy development emerging from our analysis. First, we provide a synopsis of the *policy framing, dynamics,* and *instruments* employed in the legislative discourse, then we tease out the evolution of each policy facet in thematic sub-headings.

5.1 Policy Framing

AWE policy is the "result of a complex, uneven, and multilayered set of cross-cutting processes and loci of interaction that assign value (social and economic) to the education and training of adults across time and geography" (Roumell, Salajan, & Todoran, 2020, p. 27). Analyzing legislation in the AWE policy arena not only reveals how multiple actors (e. g., federal agencies, states, nongovernmental organizations, and local providers) come together to exercise authority and allocate resources, but also how conventional cultural understandings and norms regarding the purpose, function, and scope of adult and workforce education are codified and translated into national and state infrastructure for educational programming.

What has been consistently reiterated across legislative documents over time is a grand narrative about establishing an architecture of public institutions to be leveraged as a means for pursuing national economic aims. Even so, American idealism has also regularly been signaled in sweeping statements communicating larger social values such as promoting the individual pursuit of "the good life"[3] (Baritz, 1988), improving access to education for underserved populations, and seeking social and economic justice.

2 For a more detailed description of the policy framework and research methods, please see Roumell, Salajan and Todoran (2019).

3 "The good life" refers to Aristotle's theory of ethics, where a human being can live the way that is most suitable for a human within reason. Reason, as it stands, is what separates humans from animals.

5.2 Policy Dynamics

Prior to WIOA, references to more general education reform were rare, perhaps because much of the AWE policy and programming was integrated piecemeal into other forms of educational legislation. The lack of references to broader educational reform in AWE policy may also indicate that the AWE system itself has been underdeveloped. The aim of the new legislation is to create an interface between AWE programming and the more formalized education system. Under WIOA, states are now required to align federal and state AWE standards, and to align AWE standards with both K-12 and higher education standards. Adult basic education programs are also increasingly being required to partner with workforce development and job programs. This synchronized alignment with the other levels and kinds of education – which heretofore had been developed independently within their own areas – constitutes major policy shifts that carry far-reaching implications for programmatic structure, partnerships, and data requirements, all of which requires substantial systemwide capacity development. Additionally, to better address the obvious siloing effects and duplication in the AWE policy domain, mechanisms requiring increased partnership across AWE systems, networks, and actors are notable changes to improve feedback mechanisms between provider, state, and federal agents.

5.3 Policy Instruments

AWE policy instruments primarily consist of the financial appropriations for adult education programming. Only a few of such policy instruments exist in the earlier stages of policy formulation, but emerge with the George-Deen Act of 1936, and became more complex, extensive and diversified with the passing of the Vocational Education Act of 1963. The expanse and substance of the financial instruments embedded in AWE legislation reach a culminating point with the more recent combined legislative packets of WIA 1998 and WIOA 2014, in which interconnected and complementary adult education and literacy programs, as well as vocational programs for youth and vulnerable populations, receive record Congressional appropriations. Apart from financial instruments, over time, successive amendments or repeals of legislation represent the secondary type of policy instruments operationalized in AWE policy formulation. Such targeted revisions and reformulations of policy instruments consistently occur in the course of AWE policy development, particularly as later legislative packages combine multiple titles and programs operating under parallel or complementary legislative acts that are periodically amended.

5.4 Accessibility and Flexibility (Facet F1)

The first policy facet we examined represents legislative references aimed at improving accessibility to educational programming and making new kinds of training available. Within this policy facet, programs were either created, maintained, expanded, or somehow further developed. References for this facet were primarily categorized under the function of policy framing, meaning the legislative language is outlining the rationale and need for AWE provisions. The more recent integration of

adult literacy, education, and job training programs into the workforce development system at the federal level, starting with the 1998 Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and then the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), is a moniker of change in federal AWE policy framing. Linking the AWE policy arena more explicitly with workforce development programs profoundly altered the AWE polity in terms of purpose (framing), who the partners are and how actions are carried out (dynamics), and scope of action (instruments created to carry out the policy intent) (ED, 2013). This 21st century integration demarcates a philosophical shift where AWE has been increasingly subsumed within the workforce development system, as opposed to being (partially) integrated into the broader national educational policy arena. Generally speaking, programs for adult learning have not been expressly represented within broader national educational reforms, but rather as subsections of landmark omnibus legislative acts, in almost ad hoc fashion, which is why AWE policy can be found embedded in a wide variety of legislative acts.

There has also been a marked shift toward Career and Technical Education (CTE) in policy framing, a current reality affecting both adult and higher education, indicating the prioritization around preparing all youth and adult students for success in college and career (ED, 2014). Globalization has also sharpened the competitive market in higher education, causing universities, colleges, and technical schools to offer services that increasingly overlap with adult education programming. Ultimately, the increasing competition for learners may turn out to be problematic for adults who need more traditional adult educational services than those typically offered through universities and community colleges (Pickard, 2019). This development is also paralleled in resource allocation patterns, where AWE programming has also experienced diminishing state and federal funding as priorities continue to change (Wheelan, 2016).

While the notion of lifelong learning is increasingly part of mainstream national educational dialogue and discourse, AWE policy initiatives and strategic goals for education reform are increasingly functioning as an instrumental mechanism for improving other economic and social goals. Between AWE policy being integrated within workforce initiatives, and the new emphasis on the alignment of postsecondary, career, technical and other educational and workforce systems to create more streamlined "Career Pathways," the rationale in how AWE policy is being framed has become almost monolithically embedded within the economic and human capital development paradigm.

5.5 Software and Product Development (Facet F2); Teaching and Learning (Facet F3)

We coded references to affordances for or the use of technology in the delivery and improvements to teaching and curriculum under the second and third policy facets, respectively. WIOA 2014 mandates state to include a section addressing provisions for technology use in learning, both for educators and for learners in their AWE plans. Programming should include technological improvements to facilitate access

to, and improve the quality of, services and activities such as: the enhancement of digital literacy skills; the acceleration of the acquisition of workforce skills and recognized postsecondary credentials; and strengthening the professional development of providers and workforce professionals (WIOA, 2014). Building on WIA 1998, AWE policy has also included a growing number of references to the improvement of teaching and learning practices, requiring more specificity in teaching practice and measurement of teaching effectiveness. Recent legislation also outlined curriculum and teaching practices including: improving distance education; promoting and improving the use of technology in the classroom, especially in English language acquisition for English language learners; and assistance in the development and dissemination of evidence-based models for adult basic education, literacy programs, and digital literacy skills.

5.6 Financing AWE (Facet F4)

The AWE policy area has been steadily subsidized by the federal government for over a century, and many of the federal AWE programs are long-standing. Four main funding mechanisms are utilized by the federal government to support AWE, including grants-in-aid, contracts for services, direct operational support, and aid to adult learners. Of all funding mechanisms, the most attention has been given to the distribution of federal grants-in-aid to each of the individual states to implement programs like adult basic education, vocational education or rehabilitation, English language learning, or employment services. Significant financial aid has also been provided to adult learners on a large-scale but sporadic basis in the form of educational benefits to veterans, scholarships for teachers of foreign language, science, mathematics, and other subjects, and providing education and training for employment transitions.

AWE funding structures are multifaceted, involving multiple agencies, sources, and levels. In recent decades, total state and federal expenditures for AWE programming have remained stagnant. The growing number of references under the funding facet reflects the increasing complexity in the financial structures for the provision of AWE programming nationally. The policies also specifically create room for the incorporation of financial resources outside of federal and state funding, outlining the process of braiding multiple resources to deliver services. Consequently, providers today are subject to fluctuating state and federal oversight and can be funded through several combinations of public (federal, state, and local) and private funds, such as donor gifts, accrued endowment interest, and tuition revenues. This mixture of institutions and funding sources has made it even more difficult to identify a coherent national AWE policy commitment and agenda (Roumell, Salajan, & Todoran, 2019). While it certainly can be said there has been a substantial policy overhaul via WIOA, resources have not kept pace, and the localized impact of the federal mandates remains to be determined.

5.7 Diversity of Stakeholders and Partnerships (Facet F5)

The aim of recent federal policy and legislation has been to clarify, streamline, reduce duplication, and improve funding coordination for more targeted AWE programming. Within this policy facet, AWE policy is growing in complexity as the relationships and responsibilities between the federal government, state governments, regional workforce boards, and local service providers have been increasingly formalized and stakeholder representation diversified. In looking at the increasing formalization of roles and partnerships, we have argued that the architecture of a more comprehensive system within the AWE realm is slowly being built (Roumell, Salajan, & Todoran, 2019). WIOA has contributed to a clearer definition of the AWE architecture, defining who the official actors should be at each level, and designing how the workforce, social, and education systems are to work together to improve educational, social, and employment-related services for adults. With this situatedness in mind, it will be particularly important for AWE researchers to identify and trace the impact and actual educational access and economic outcomes of these policy initiatives.

5.8 Collaboration, Cooperation and Consortia (Facet F6)

Although references to programmatic cooperation and collaboration are scant throughout much of the history of AWE policy evolution, frequency increased as the scope of the legislation expanded, enhancing coordination between various federal agencies. Initially, the Department of Labor was primarily tasked with overseeing vocational training programs, and in successive legislation this responsibility was gradually shared with the Department of Education. Additionally, state education agencies charged with the actual implementation of AWE programs are dependent on federal financial provisions and obligated to cooperate with federal agencies. WIOA 2014 policy discourse became more explicit concerning roles and cooperation, requiring not only the functional cooperation and coordination on administrative duties among agencies at various levels, but also cooperation on the substance of communication related to such programming. In this respect, a greater emphasis on cooperation toward greater integration of complementary programs and services is notable in more recent legislation, including provisions for ensuring the welfare of vulnerable populations experiencing disadvantaged or discriminatory circumstances.

5.9 Data, Evaluation, and Research (Facet F7)

In the U. S., the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor are authorized to design, conduct, and disseminate high-quality research to support improvements in the area of AWE. The Office of Career Technical and Adult Education's (OCTEA) investment in research helps develop evidence-based practices in literacy education, English language acquisition, high school completion, adult education curricula for improved program performance and outcomes. The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) provides empirical evidence developed through rigorous research to serve as a basis for education policy and practice. The DOL's Employment

and Training Administration (ATF) contributes research toward the more efficient functioning of the national labor market by informing high-quality job training, employment service programs, labor market information, and income maintenance services (i. e., unemployment insurance), which are primarily delivered through state and local workforce development systems (ED, 2008).

In 1998, WIA legislation mandated the creation of a performance accountability system to assess states' progress in providing services in order to ensure an improved return on the investment of federal funds in AWE programming. Unlike previous accountability measures, where local programs were held accountable at the state level, Title II of WIA 1998 made states accountable to the federal ED in a systematic way. Title II of WIOA 2014 amended requirements within the performance accountability system, requiring providers to get approval by demonstrating measurable participant outcomes and other specified program goals. Under WIOA, federal requirements for funding stipulated greater coordination of learning outcomes and program standards, increased accountability, implementation of evidence-based programming and practices, and enhanced overall federal oversight. These new requirements went into effect in 2016, meaning program evaluations, state reporting, and current implementation and translational research will play a critical role in identifying the overall impact of recent legislation. It is imperative that these implementation trends be followed and mandates examined in close detail to see how services have been transformed and adult learner populations impacted.

5.10 Wider Educational Reforms (Facet F8)

Except for mandated amendments to intersecting or complementary legislation, such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act or Higher Education Act of 1965, AWE policy is largely silent on promoting reforms in the broader educational domain. Notably, the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 sets objectives for colleges and universities to accommodate vocational and agricultural training through extension work. This signaled a need on part of higher education institutions to adapt their curricula in meeting these goals and, therefore, suggested a modest reform process to this end. Such calls are reiterated later in the policy evolution process, particularly in the Perkins Act of 1998, which advocated for the integration of vocational and technical instruction in secondary and postsecondary education. For the most part, however, AWE policy has a marginal impact on wider educational reform processes, operating minimal and implicit adjustments to other educational sectors only through amendments to a limited number of policy instruments it complements, or on which it relies, to deliver AWE programming.

5.11 Equity, Inclusion, and Social Dimensions (Facet F9)

Jacobson (2017, p. 22) explained how "under WIOA, state and local systems are expected to provide a full range of services to marginalized populations with the understanding that learners will not be successful in education or training without them", which emphasizes the dimension of social inclusion in AWE policy. It could be

argued that the alterations in federal-state relations and policy dynamics, the expansion and diversification of policy actors, and an upgrading of AWE as a national priority are legitimate efforts toward meeting the needs of vulnerable adult populations in a more comprehensive way. Even so, researchers express concern about the possible unintended consequences of the mandates. Although WIOA prioritizes services for diverse populations of adults who are deemed 'basic skills deficient,' it may prove difficult for these difficult-to-reach populations to adequately demonstrate improved learning outcomes in terms of test scores and employment. This increasing pressure on providers to meet performance benchmarks could spur them to prioritize the enrollment of individuals who can more easily and quickly "meet the mark." Ultimately, such quality measures may unwittingly further marginalize the adult learners who are most in need of educational services (Jacobsen, 2017; Pickard, 2019) instead of improving support for them.

6 Observations and Discussion

Now that we have offered an overview of the nine policy facets and a concise description within the U. S. context, we will briefly cover the patterns and trends observed through our deductive analytic process of applying the policy coding matrix. Once coding of selected legislation was completed, we quantified the number of references within each of the policy facets. Next, we collapsed totals of the three columns and converted the numeric data into a bubble chart to visually illustrate the growing emphasis in each of the policy facets over the decades. Figure 1 provides a visual illustration of the results of our content analysis.

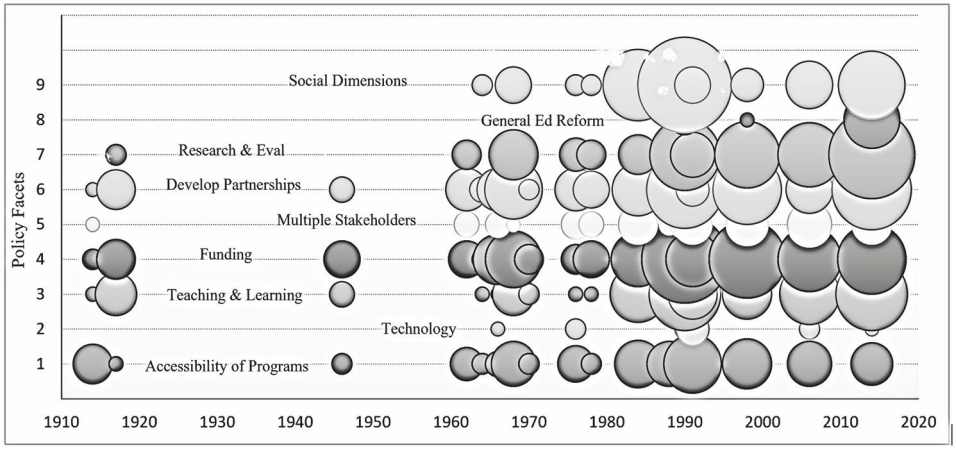

Figure 1: Change in historical policy facet and function emphasis across AWE legislative documents (Note: First published in Adult Education Quarterly [Roumell, Salajan, & Todoran, 2019])

6.1 Detecting Policy Patterns

The deductive analytic process of quantifying referent codes and locating them under particular facets and functions within the policy matrix revealed patterns in the overall development of AWE policy, where legislation seemed to surge in particular decades (1910s, 1940s, 1960s, 1990s, and 2010s). Legislation and amendments were passed during intermittent years, but primarily to amend or add to policy provisions. As can be seen in Figure 1, there seem to be a few prominent "eras" of AWE policy development (Roumell & Martin, 2020).

The first policy era (ca. 1862–1917) came during the Industrial Revolution, when programs were established in response to changes in the economic and social spheres. In that period, additional programs were developed to help adults integrate into the national economy. In the second era (ca. 1918–1961), legislation was again passed in response to new social issues and economic patterns including the Great Depression and World Wars. It must be noted that several documents created in the first half of the 20th century have endured throughout the decades, and are still referenced in new legislation (for example the GI Bill).

The third era of AWE policy development (1962–1997), a renaissance in humanistic adult education, began in the 1960s. The legislation establishing federally funded adult basic education programs originated from the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which provided a suite of federal programs to address issues related to poverty in the United States (ED, 1991; Sticht, 2002). The Adult Education Act of 1966 formally established adult education as an independent area of educational policy at the federal level. Within a span of two years, every state in the nation implemented a system of adult education and delivered instruction via local providers. The Civil Rights Movement also spurred the expansion of adult literacy services, and adult educators argued that the field should also embrace the fight against racial, gender, cultural, and other forms of discrimination, and the ongoing pursuit of social equity and justice. Policy analysis of legislation in this decade revealed further articulation across nearly all policy facets, indicating more comprehensive AWE policies. In the 1960s, the fourth policy facet signifying funding, displayed regular fiduciary increases as new AWE programs were established, reauthorized, and/or amended into the 1970s.

Many of the policy codes that occurred in the late-1980s into the 1990s were a result of AWE policy being "reorganized." During the 1990s AWE funding priorities and programming options were impacted by New Federalism policies of devolution (Hayes, 1999). Devolution sought to transfer policy responsibilities from the federal government to state and local governments. Several legislative acts were also passed as the basis for "welfare reform" and reshaped the role of adult literacy education. The shifting economy and technology became a focus of policy development, and programs were continued, replaced, or expanded.

During the fourth AWE era (ca. 1998-present), consistent additions were made to the architecture of the AWE policy arena, with additional references across the majority of policy facets. The reference counts provide evidence that more comprehensive policy provisions were developed to support AWE. As can be seen in Figure 1,

around the turn of the century, a large increase in codes can be seen across all policy areas.

First, AWE programs were mandated to partner with state and local workforce development systems, and the expansion of non-traditional policy actors continued, including public libraries, community centers, faith organizations, and a variety of not-for profit, private, and public service providers [F5]. Between these collaborators, AWE systems and providers were also required to "braid funding" and work toward streamlining and reducing duplication of services [F4]. Equally important, WIA and WIOA promoted greater interagency cooperation in order to serve commonly held clientele (offering literacy programs and job placement programs in the same location, e. g., "one-stop shops") representing a paradigm shift in the provision of joint adult education and job training [F6].

Title II of WIA also legislated the creation of a performance accountability system which, unlike previous measures requiring programs to report to their state agencies, systematically held states accountable to the federal Department of Education [F7] (ED, 2013). The 2006 Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins Act) was enacted with the goal of transforming Career and Technical Education (CTE), introducing Career Pathways-focused initiatives and advancing integration of AWE programming across educational systems. Notably, in this most recent policy wave, there were more references to general education reform [F8], perhaps signaling alignment and integration of AWE with the massive K-16 education systems.

The aim of recent legislation was to coordinate programs housed within multiple agencies, bringing them together under the scope of the Career Pathways initiative (DOL, 2012). Under WIOA, AWE programming was further integrated under and embedded within the expanding workforce development system at the local, state, and federal levels. While most AWE program implementation is still primarily the responsibility of states and carried out locally, the federal dictates and requirements for funding have moved toward greater centralization of standards, data requirements, and accountability and promotion of evidence-based programming. Consequently, federal oversight of state and local programming has increased.

Over the past two decades, a cumulating effect in complexity of policy development with the gradual legislative additions and amendments in the AWE policy area can be discerned. Under new mandates for partnering with local workforce development boards, coalitions, and other stakeholders [F5, F6]; increasing data, assessment, and evaluation requirements [F7]; mandates aligning standards and curriculum with secondary, postsecondary, vocational, and higher education [F8]; and the ongoing need to offer wraparound services to address sociostructural barriers to adult learner participation [F9], the leaders in adult education, educators, staff, and volunteers themselves face immense pressure to further develop their own professional gambit [F3]. Unfortunately, quality and consistent professional development can be difficult to find [F3], is time consuming, and also often presents an unreasonable cost burden for educators who are poorly remunerated (Housel, 2020). Despite

the last two decades of efforts in AWE policy reform to enhance interoperability at the federal level and across states, the U. S. AWE polity still remains only loosely coordinated, the diffusion of policy attenuated, and the goals, means, and ends of the initiatives unfocused (Roumell, Salajan, & Todoran, 2020).

6.2 Policy Adjustments and Adaptations

Using a systematic, deductive analytic approach as applied to key legislative documents not only helps us better understand the elaboration of a policy area over time, but also identify areas of policy development that need attention. Having examined policy development trends over time, we also speculate that the evolution of provisions for educational services, and the legislation in which these provisions are codified, are becoming more sophisticated and encompassing. Engendering a more nuanced examination of the evident adaptations of educational policy with such an analytical framework may also help better understand how educational systems change to meet societies' shifting demands.

6.3 Final Thoughts

As evidenced, the U. S. has a long history of articulating policy regarding the education of adults, under the auspices of national aims, with WIA 1998 and WIOA 2014 representing the most recent efforts at developing a more coherent policy architecture for AWE programming. It seems, however, like serious conversations are still required about the capability of states and communities to implement such initiatives, especially in light of the pittance of funding dedicated to adult literacy and learning [F4]. Despite the wider federal policy overhaul through WIOA 2014, it is possible that AWE programming may have only limited impact simply due to a lack of political will to adequately support the changes (Roumell, Salajan, & Todoran, 2020). Many strident calls for improvements in educational and workforce planning abound, but the question is: does the present policy architecture address the realistic needs, capabilities, and requisite mechanisms for these aims to be successfully carried out?

While the application of the policy matrix helps provide an overview of how AWE policy has developed over time, and gives us some clues as to the increasing sophistication and coverage of the policies, the reality is that much more needs to be done to more fully address the limited literacy and learning capabilities of some 43 million adults in the U. S. (COABE, 2019). Policy development in the AWE realm leaves the impression of isomorphic mimicry (Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2019). The notion of *isomorphic mimicry* conveys the tendency of systems to mimic other systems' successes, as an attempt to replicate their structures, processes, and even their examples of "best practices," in hopes of attaining similar results. From this view, "form and function are conflated, where 'looks like' substitutes for 'does'" (Andrews et al., 2019, p. 31). One may even go so far as to argue that such policies produce the appearance of administrative structures that mimic educational systems, but that the cobbled together AWE system of adult education programming may not actually fully function as a coherent lifelong learning system. Our concern is, under

WIOA, that the AWE system continues to appear "as if" it were a real educational system with lifelong learning aims, but merely functions as an ad hoc arrangement that inadvertently reproduces more of the same disproportionate outcomes.

Despite recent, ambitious legislation and ongoing policy revisions and amendments, Cyril Houle's (1968) description of the U. S. adult and workforce education system still rings true:

> "To many observers, American adult education seems very much like the United States itself: decentralized in some respects and centralized in others; showing extremes of poverty and wealth; built up from a hundred different sets of assumptions and directed toward a thousand goals; concerned with the ways of doing things and sometimes heedless of why they are done; given to fads and overemphases, quickly followed by boredom and disillusionment; incorporating countless cultural and ethnic value systems; operating in geographic and social environments of great diversity; looking always toward an expanding future; uncoordinated; unintegrated; and often loudly contradictory. Much of this picture may lie only in the eyes of its beholders, but much of it is also true." (Houle, 1968, p. 166)

Even so, despite perennial concerns about retrenchment, somehow AWE programming continues to be funded and is expanding. Ironically, it is the pluralities in purposes and approaches; the flexibility of federal guidance that allows for local-level experimentation; the ability to tolerate systemic ambiguities; the openness to creating new partnerships and consortia; the stubborn refusal to prioritize one educational view over all others; unrelenting U. S. pragmatism; and the indelible belief that individuals should have multiple pathways in pursuing their personal improvement and social station, that drives adult and lifelong learning to continue to grow and sprawl in innumerable directions across the policy(?) expanses of the United States.

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Appendix

Table 1: Adult and Workforce Education Policy Documents
(Asterisk * indicates legislative documents selected for coding)

Year	Policy	Description
1862	Morrill Act	Established institutions in each state to educate people in "practical" professions, through extension services and continuing and outreach education.
1887	Hatch Act	Funded agriculture experimental stations.
1890	Morrill Act extension	
1906	Adams Act	Direct federal payments to states for vocational education purposes.
1914*	Smith-Lever Bill	Entry of US government into Adult Education. Improve agriculture making it efficient and profitable through cooperative agricultural extension work.
1917*/19/24	Smith-Hughs Vocational Act	Promote vocational agriculture to train people "who have entered or are preparing to enter upon the work of the farm."
1917	The Board for Vocational Education was created	
1918*/1919*	Vocational Rehabilitation Act	Rehabilitate soldiers discharged from service.
1929*	George Reed Act	To further develop vocational education
1933	Wagner-Peyser Act	Established a nationwide system of public employment offices, to improve the functioning of the nation's labor markets.
1930/1943	Federal Emergency Relief Administration	Ameliorate the effects of the Great Depression.
1936*	George Deen Act	To further develop vocational education
1944	GI Bill	Tuition for war veterans to obtain education and training to reintegrate into the economy.
1946*	George-Barden Act	Expansion of career education programs to serve the needs of a growing population.
1954*	Smith McConnell Act	Amend the Vocational Rehabilitation Act
1960s	As of the 1960s, there were about 350 separate Adult Education programs scattered through the executive branch	
1962*	Manpower Development and Training Act	Authorized a three-year program aimed at retraining workers displaced by new technology.
1963*	Vocational Education Act	Marked a new era of vocational education to maintain, improve, and extend VocEd, provide better access to vocational training and re-training for gainful employment. Broadened the definition of vocational education and expanded the delivery systems.

(Continuing table 1)

Year	Policy	Description
1964*	Economic Opportunity Act	Mobilize human and financial resources to combat poverty in the U. S.
1965*	Vocational Rehabilitation Act	Amend the VRA for more flexibility and financing administration of programs, expansion and improvement of services and facilities including those with developmental challenges
1966*	Adult Education Act	Codification of Adult Education principles and as a distinct field. Adult literacy and high school equivalency, aimed at developing a more literate and skilled workforce (deficit model).
1967*	Vocational Rehabilitation Act	Extend and expand rehabilitation services, establishment of National Center for Deaf and Blind Youth and Adults, provide assistance for migrants
1968*	Extension Adult Education Program	Adding private and nonprofit stakeholders for Adult Ed, extend services to territories,
1968	Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act	Emphasis for funding changed from expansion to program improvement and serving at-risk populations, with 2 goals: 1) Improve skills of the labor force and prepare adults for job opportunities; 2) provide equal opportunities for adults in vocational education.
1970*	Amend Adult Education Act	Expand educational opportunity through adult and continuing education programs and occupational training
1976*	Education Amendments 1976	Extend and revise 1963 Vocational Education Act, revision of public library resources, student assistance grants, occupational training, women's education equity, amend AEA 1966, report on high school equivalency, migrant programs
1978	Community Schools and Comprehensive Community Education Act, Title XIII, Part A	Expanded educational opportunities for adults and encouraged the establishment of further Adult Educational programming.
1979	Department of Education Organization Act	Separated Education from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and created the Department of Education at a national cabinet level.
1984*	Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act	Funded community colleges and technical schools in response to the economic downturn in the 1970s.
1990	Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act	Organized educational programs in current or emerging occupations requiring credentials other than a baccalaureate or advanced degree.
1991*	National Literacy Act	Strengthened and coordinated adult literacy programs to enhance literacy and basic skills of adults. Renewed focus on basic education programs.
1993	Government Performance Results Act	Required federal agencies to develop indicators of program performance to demonstrate they are meeting goals. 1996 a system for program accountability was developed by the ED.

(Continuing table 1)

Year	Policy	Description
1997	National Reporting System	Developed an outcomes-based reporting system for state administered federal programs.
1998*	Adult Education Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) (combined with WIA below)	Replaced the Adult Education Act and the National Literacy Act.
1998	Workforce Investment Act	Reformed the diversified and complex delivery system of adult and basic education, authorized the National Literacy Act to coordinate literacy services and policy which was further approved through No Child Left Behind legislation.
1999/2000	National Reporting System for Adult Education	Established accountability to assess the effectiveness of eligible agencies in achieving continuous improvement in Adult Education and literacy activities.
2006*	Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins Act) was enacted with the goal of transforming Career and Technical Education (CTE)	Supported secondary and postsecondary programs to build academic, career, and technical skills. Supported Tech Prep, an educational model that articulates secondary and postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) in a multiyear program in such areas as engineering, technology, applied science, health, and applied economics.
2009	Families Learning and Understanding English Together Act	Improved the literacy and English skills of limited English proficient individuals, and for other purposes.
2009	Naturalized Citizens Assistance Act	Authorized awards for adult education and literacy programs for naturalized citizens.
2009	National Adult Education and Family Literacy Week	Designated a National Adult Education and Family Literacy Week. Encouraged support of communities in need of adult education and family literacy programs.
2010	Ready-to-Compete Act	Amended the 1965 ESEA and the 1998 WIA, and awarded grants to prepare individuals for the 21st century workplace and to increase US global competitive edge. Authorized grants to public television stations that formed partnerships with states, state workforce investment boards, or institutions of higher education to develop, disseminate, and provide online and on-air education and training services for adults.
2011	Workforce Investment through Local Libraries Act "WILL"	Amended WIA 1998 to integrate public libraries into state and local Workforce Investment Boards.
2011	Native Culture, Language, and Access for Success in Schools Act	Established an American Indian Tribal College or University Adult Education and Family Literacy program (amended WIA 1998).
2011	Helping Individuals Return to Employment Act	Authorized the Secretary of Labor to award grants to eligible entities to hire unemployed individuals age 16 and older to work (minimum of 20 hours per week) to benefit certain communities, including activities such as public works, beautification, historic restoration, tutoring, and adult education.

(Continuing table 1)

Year	Policy	Description
2011	Strengthen and Unite Communities with Civics Education and English Development Act	Strengthened communities through English literacy and civics education for newly arrived Americans.
2013	Adult Education and Economic Growth Act	Increased access to adult education to provide for economic growth.
2014	Building Upon Unique Indian Learning and Development Act	Authorized appropriations for scholarships and adult education and special higher education scholarships under the Snyder Act.
2014/2016*	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)	Replaced WIA 1998 to strengthen and improve the public workforce system for youth and those with significant barriers to employment into high-quality jobs and careers and help employers hire and retain skilled workers.
2017	Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act	Reauthorized the Carl D. Perkins CTE Act of 2006 (Perkins IV) and continued Congress' commitment in providing CTE programs for our nation's youth and adults.

Table 2.: Adult and Workforce Education Policy Analysis Framework

Policy Functions / Policy Facets	Framing	Dynamics	Instruments
F1	Policy provisions for: Improving accessibility and flexibility of (re)training programs.		
F2	Policy provisions for: Software, materials and product development.		
F3	Policy provisions for: Transforming teaching and learning (technology/online/information literacy, support, professional development, etc.)		
F4	Policy provisions for: Multiple funding streams and sustainability.		
F5	Policy provisions for: Multiple stakeholders, public and private interested groups, entities, institutions, etc.		
F6	Policy provisions for: Development of consortia and institutional/regional agreements, collaboration and cooperation.		
F7	Policy provisions for: Increasing and/or diversifying research, evaluation, assessment and dissemination.		
F8	Policy provisions for: Promotion of wider education reform processes.		
F9	Policy provisions for: social Issues, all-inclusive society, societal benefits, social model, social progress, individual needs, etc.		

Note. A fuller description of the framework is presented in Roumell, Erichsen & Salajan (2014).

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