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International and Comparative Perspectives on Adult Education. Lehrbücher für Erwachsenen- und Weiterbildung. Bielefeld wbv/utb 2024

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# Review: International and Comparative Perspectives on Adult Education

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**Field, John & Boeren, Ellen: International and Comparative Perspectives on Adult Education. Lehrbücher für Erwachsenen- und Weiterbildung. Bielefeld wbv/utb 2024, 164 Seiten.**

As volume nine of the series “Textbooks for Adult and Continuing Education”, John Field and Ellen Boeren published a book titled “International and Comparative Perspectives on Adult Education”. It is the only volume in English of this series and the only volume written by non-German authors.

The book’s addressees are primarily students, but it should also be interesting for practitioners, stakeholders and policy actors. The aspiration of the authors is high: “Given the broad range of international and comparative adult education dimensions covered in this book, it is meant as a wholistic introduction to the field” (p. 12).

And to state this up front already, the authors fully meet their aspiration and present a well-balanced and didactically elaborated textbook. While the introduction of the characters of Lena and Felix, who accompany the reader throughout the book, might be a little too much didactically, the overall concept including highlighted definitions, notes, examples and above all questions and tasks at the end of each chapter (and suggested solutions at the end of the book) is very convincing.

Chapter one focuses on classifications and definitions of terms which is pivotal for international and comparative adult education research since it needs to be clear what exactly is being compared. The authors refer to classifications and typologies of international organizations like UNESCO or OECD as well as by researchers of the field like Desjardins or Boeren and Whittaker.

The development of the field of international and comparative adult education is discussed in chapter two. The authors introduce a three-phase-approach, distinguishing the phase of the beginning of international connections at the end of the 19th century, the institutionalization phase between 1918 and 1950 and the formalization phase of international links as policy goals as of the 1970s. This chapter develops a broader understanding of how international and comparative adult education impact on adult education policy and practice.

Chapters three, four and five are dedicated to international and comparative adult education research. Chapter three provides an overview of the field as well as of the state-of-the-art of research by referring to recently published review articles. It also displays an overview of journals specialized in international and comparative adult education research as well as book series dealing with the subject. As such this chapter provides an informative overview of the field. Chapter four focuses on theories and

basically follows the argument of the *Handbook of Theory in Comparative and International Education* that there are five so-called foundational theories used for studies in the field. As such the authors elaborate (1) structural-functionalism, (2) imperialism, colonialism and coloniality, (3) world system analysis and dependency theory, (4) Marxism and (5) Human Capital Theory.

Chapter five is dedicated to methodological approaches to the study of international and comparative adult education. The chapter gives a very broad overview of different methodologies starting by introducing Egetenmeyer's adaptation of the Bray and Thomas cube. The authors also focus on the selection of units of comparison as well as on the differentiation between case- and variable-oriented approaches. All in all, the three chapters equip the readers with a starting set needed to read and understand studies in international and comparative adult education as well as to take first steps towards conducting their own research.

Chapters six and seven are concerned with the role and influence of international organizations regarding international and comparative adult education. As such eminent organizations ranging from the European Union to World Bank and the International Labor Organizations are presented and analyzed as regards the impact on research, policy and practice in international and comparative adult education. Chapter seven concentrates upon international surveys which are carried out by international organizations. As such, the International Adult Literacy Study (IALS) and the Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) by the OECD, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) by the European Union, the Global Reports on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) by UNESCO and Skills Towards Employability and Productivity (STEP) by World Bank are discussed.

Chapter eight applies a non-Western perspective and concentrates on international and comparative adult education in low-income and Asian countries as well as countries of the so-called Global South. This is an important chapter since it makes clear, that there is research and knowledge production in adult education beyond the Western world.

Digitalization and the digital world are at the core of chapter nine. The chapter focuses on digital literacy, the importance of internet access, the growth of open education and on digital resources. Thus, it analyzes the impact of digitalization on international and comparative adult education.

Chapter ten focuses on adult education advocacy and organizations for advocacy. In particular, the International Council for Adult Education is presented with its campaigning work in different world regions.

The textbook concludes with chapter eleven focusing on international partnerships and exchange projects. By highlighting the Erasmus + program of the European Union this chapter provides some guidance where to apply for funding but also underlines the importance of the cooperations with countries of the Global South by focusing on the work of German DVV International.

In conclusion, I highly recommend this textbook to students, practitioners and policy actors who aim at getting started with international and comparative perspec-

tives on adult education. It is recommended as a basic textbook for formal education settings e. g. university seminars as well as a textbook for independent self-study.

## Author

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