

Review: Between PIAAC and the New Literacy Studies. What adult education can learn from large-scale assessments without adopting the neo-liberal paradigm

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Anke Grotlüschen; Lisanne Heilmann (Eds.): *Between PIAAC and the New Literacy Studies. What adult education can learn from large-scale assessments without adopting the neo-liberal paradigm*. Muenster; New York: Waxmann. 265pp.

Large-scale assessments provide internationally comparable data on educational levels in different countries. This is linked to the assumption of a benefit for the adult education sector as large-scale assessments promise an overview of the national education situation. In addition, the data offer insights into other countries' education policies and strategies. Apart from this, criticism is directed at PIAAC and similar surveys regarding, for instance, the focus on rankings or labor market outcomes of education. Furthermore, hierarchies are strengthened as the OECD increases its influence over national education policies (Grotlüschen & Heilmann, p.7). Starting from this point, Anke Grotlüschen and Lisanne Heilmann pose the question if further benefits can be derived from large datasets. The aim of the collection is to provide an overview of different questions adult education researchers deal with using PIAAC data. The goal is to demonstrate the benefits of a critical approach to large-scale assessments, as well as the insight potential of big data for further research.

The first part of the collection, "Learning from PIAAC", presents alternative interpretations and perspectives on PIAAC data. By combining a secondary analysis of PIAAC data with the social practices approach of the New Literacy Studies, Barbara Nienkemper and Anke Grotlüschen were able to identify three groups of adults. These three groups are differentiated by using their frequency of skill-related activities as a foundation, not their assessed literacy level. A particularly interesting group consists of adults who are not part of the labor market or are in employment that offers few opportunities for skill use. Members of this group seem to compensate the lack of opportunities at work by using their skills in everyday life (Nienkemper & Grotlüschen, p. 29). This finding challenges the stereotypical image of adults with low literacy skills avoiding skill-related activities. Anke Grotlüschen, Christopher Stammer and Thomas J. Sork focus on the professionalization of adults in teaching positions. They found that teachers have higher levels of digital literacy than expected. The last paper of this part questions the adequacy of PIAAC in assessing competences. Anke

Grotlüschen, Barbara Nienkemper and Caroline Duncker-Euringer suggest additional testing, especially at lower levels.

The papers of the second part deal with different forms of marginalization in and by large-scale assessments. Anke Grotlüschen, Lisanne Heilmann, Gregor Dutz and Svetlana Chachashvili-Bolotin compare the feelings of socio-political participation of recently arrived migrants in Austria, Canada, Germany, Israel and the USA. Their first article points out descriptive statistical differences between migrant populations, language minorities and the rest of the population, while the second article uses regression analyses to show the relation of these three groups to socio-political participation. These two articles demonstrate different types of results that statistical approaches can offer. Speaking of 'southering', Anke Grotlüschen and Klaus Buddeberg describe a re-colonising effect caused by the expansion of international studies into the so-called global South. They state that stereotypical images can also occur in relation to countries and are reinforced by the regional distribution of PIAAC. This process is not an intentional procedure, but a side effect of general data analysis which is initiated by the time pressure resulting from supranational agreements (Grotlüschen & Buddeberg, p. 164). Nevertheless, this article shows that power balances always have to be examined critically when international large-scale assessments are interpreted. The last article of the second part explores consequences of low literacy for adults. Anke Grotlüschen focuses on socially relevant areas of life such as political efficacy, social trust and volunteering. All three indicators show lower results for subpopulations with low literacy skills. According to Grotlüschen, the results might indicate that low-literate adults have fewer opportunities for political participation (Grotlüschen, p. 186).

The aim of the third part is to understand the interrelation of literacy and social participation. The articles focus on the power structures affecting this relation. Using quantitative data, Jana Wienberg and Anke Grotlüschen analyze the role of literacy and language education for refugees and migrants in Germany. They point out that a successful literacy course attendance does not necessarily ensure that the German written language is mastered (Wienberg & Grotlüschen, p. 208). The lack of transitions into the regular literacy system may be a decisive factor in this regard. The second article by Anke Grotlüschen, Klaus Buddeberg, Gregor Dutz, Lisanne Heilmann and Christopher Stammer is based on a nationwide assessment of literacy skills in Germany. The paper gives an overview of different literacy practices and competences along with their links to social participation for the German population. The last paper of the collection examines learning and skill-use situations in the lives of adults with low literacy. Anke Grotlüschen focuses on the PIAAC subpopulations of literacy or numeracy level 1 and below and their relation to adult education and training, to informal learning at work and learning strategies. She describes the paradox that stimulating work environments encourage people to develop, whereas workplace stress can discourage them from doing so (Grotlüschen, p. 257). Grotlüschen hereby directs the focus to the importance of the future design of work environments.

Overall, the anthology offers alternative perspectives on large-scale assessments for researchers, practitioners and political stakeholders in adult education. While giv-

ing reasoned critiques, it also highlights new perspectives, theoretical approaches, interpretations, and future connections to big data. Never losing sight of the underlying power structures, PIAAC and other big data thus become a valuable resource for future research in adult education.

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