STANDARDS FOR COMPARATIVE ADULT EDUCATION RESEARCH

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Introduction

The topic, "Standards for Comparative Adult Education Research", is relatively new in the field of Adult and Continuing Education in the United States. The usage of the term Lifelong Learning is often used to encompass learning for all ages and thus avoids categories such as children, youth and adults. In this presentation, the term Adult Education is used synonymously for Andragogy with the focus on the adult learning in the context of lifelong learning.

In the United States, there has been considerable attention to standards in education at the national, state and local levels with the focus primarily on schools. A standard is defined by Webster as "something established for use as a rule or basis for comparison". There are three aspects of standards: setting, implementing and assessing. A standard or benchmark is necessary as a basis for determining change, for measuring the present status and for identifying change. Standards are necessary for determining the nature and extent of learning and aspects of Adult Education including Comparative Adult Education.

In a Kappan Special Section on Standards' there was no mention in any of the articles on adult or continuing education in this otherwise excellent issue journal. In a search of Educational Resources Informational Center there were 31 entries referring to academic standards and adult education, and 32 entries referring to academic standards and continuing education. These publications included topics such as accreditation, minorities' issues, off-campus programs and others, but most of them were peripheral to academic standards. In 1986 the Commission of Professors of AAACE (American Association of Adult and Continuing Education) produced a document, Standards of Graduate Study in Adult Education, but it had only limited practical use. Another example was New York State Education Department's certificate plan developed about 1952 for instruction that required a number of hours of instruction for practicing educators of adults in public schools, but the plan was only recognized for a couple of years.

The program America 2000: An Education Strategy (1991, p. 29) initiated by President George Bush, and a continuation of it as Goals 2000 by President Bill Clinton, e an expression of major concern for improving the standards of education as national goals. In America 2000 there is a reference to Adult Education "for the rest of us, yesterday's students and today's workers, to become a nation of students", but it seems to have received little attention at the implementation stage. The Annotated Resource Guide by Charters and Siddiqui (1989) cites some references related to the topic (1989).

The above references are related to standards in Adult Education but not specifically to Standards for
Comparative Adult Education research. Comparative Adult Education may benefit from the research at other levels of comparative education and of other fields by adapting and transferring relevant research findings and research methodology.

The present research base, and even the consideration of standards in Adult Education is so limited that it is of little assistance in developing a plan for further research. However, educators of adults have previously engaged challenging tasks in the field of Adult and Continuing Education and, hence, let me proceed with same enthusiasm to discuss Standards and Comparative Adult Education Research. I wish to add that much of this material has been published in books and articles that I have written but has not been focused on this topic. Some discussion of the context of the topic follows.

Mission of Adult Education

The mission of Adult Education is "to assist adults to acquire further control of their current circumstances and their future destinies. Control enables adults to participate more intelligently and responsibly in the political, working, social, cultural, family and religious environment of society; and to improve the quality of their lives" (Charters 1986, p. 3). The focus of the mission is on the learning by the adult, which is the bottom line.

Principles of Education

Adult Education is based on the same principles as for other areas of education. Because adults have more and a greater range of experiences, the application of principles to practice may be quite different for adults in various stages of adulthood than for infants, children and youth. In general, the application of principles to practice changes as learners move through the life span and as they move along a continuum of other-directed to more self-directed. In brief, self-directed means that adults have control over what, when and how they learn to achieve their mission as stated above. A Learning Preference Assessment which includes aspects of self-direction and suggests criteria for it, is a way for individuals to indicate the extent of their preference to be self-directed (Guglielmino 1991). In Adult Education the focus is on the adult learner who may learn as a unique individual when confronted with learning opportunities which of the infrastructure known as education.

Comparative Education is an area of study within the field of Education. Likewise Comparative Adult Education is a part of Adult Education and the same principles of research apply to both of them.

Definition of Comparative Adult Education

A definition of Comparative Adult Education as used in this article is from "Comparing Adult Education Worldwide" (Charters 1983):

Comparative adult education is defined as: a) statements about the theory, principles, methodology and other topics of continuing education related to adult education, and b) comparative study of the
Intra-national is the comparison of a topic in one or more situations within one country and international is comparison of the topic in two or more situations in different countries. A comparative adult education study extends beyond descriptions of data of adult educations and/or the juxtaposition of adult education data. There is analysis and comparison to identify similarities and dissimilarities.

In the context of this book, Comparative Adult Education is limited to the international level, which means that research extends to two or more countries with all of the associated complexities.

The Need for Comparative Adult Education

Many reasons for developing theory and practice in Comparative Adult Education have been discussed. At this stage in history, three reasons that seem dominant for Comparative Adult Education research at the international level are cited.

One is suggested by the indications that the world is moving toward a global international community or entity. Accordingly, it is necessary to have information about each of the countries that are part of this movement and to have comparative data indicating similarities and differences between countries in order that international developments may proceed more efficiently and effectively.

A second reason focuses on peace. While there are currently national uprisings and revolutions and also some wars between nations, there now seems to be a greater desire for peace. Also, the United Nations seems to be increasingly active world-wide in the peace making process. Research in many areas, including Comparative Adult Education, assists in developing cooperation and understanding which is a basic for peace.

A third reason for Comparative Adult Education is suggested by the mission of Adult Education, as previously stated, which focuses on learning by adults. It seems reasonable that Comparative Adult Education Research will provide information about aspects of adult (earning in many countries. Having knowledge about adult learning at the international level thus enables all adults to maximize their learning opportunities.

Comparative Adult Education Research in two of more countries, when developed and analyzed as part of a rigorous research design, provides similarities and dissimilarities. This data is useful in developing the theory and practice of Adult Education that may-promote a world community, foster world peace, and assist adults to learn.
Determination of Standards for Comparative Adult Education Research

When the reasons for Comparative Adult Education are accepted, and a commitment is made to them, then standards should be developed for conducting a research project. A previous question may be asked: Who is involved in the setting, implementing and assessing of standards, and who influences the decisions about them? While learning may take place whenever and wherever adults have access to knowledge many learning opportunities for adults are provided by agencies.

Adult Education in the United States is not co-ordinated at the national, state or local levels -

and this is true, both as a policy matter and in practice. The types of agencies participating in some Adult Education activity include the following:

* business and industry;
* communication enterprises;
* galleries and museums;
* government agencies;
* international organizations;
* labor organizations and unions;
* military;
* post-secondary institutions;
* religious bodies;
* schools;
* correctional facilities;
* special groups (elderly, handicapped, minorities, illiterates);
* sports and recreation organizations;
* vocational and professional associations;

* and voluntary (not for profit) bodies.

This expansive array of agencies in the United States indicates diversity in all phases of the learning opportunities often called programs which they develop, and it suggests the complexity of providing standards in the United States. It makes it even more difficult to make comparisons of the United States with other countries.

The agencies even of a given type are not generally co-ordinated although some organizations such as the military and large corporations (e.g., General Motors) do have some internal standards and do award some form of recognition to employees for successfully meeting standards. Sponsors also have a role in standards as do administrators, teachers, government, accrediting bodies and many other individuals and organizations. There is a multitude of players in the area of standards in Adult Education in the United States, and they are generally without co-operation or even co-ordination of them.

It has been stated previously that the mission of Adult Education is to assist adults to learn and that learning is an individual behavior. Accordingly, it is the adult who decides what is to be and is learned. Adults may be motivated and assisted to learn, but they cannot be forced. Other individuals and sponsors can decide the nature and extent of learning opportunities to which adults may react and thus learn; however, they cannot mandate learning, because learning itself is the prerogative of the adult.

The above discussion means that there is great diversity in who sets the standards. There is also great variation in the implementation and assessment of standards. Even within a university, different people control standards for example in the same course with duplicate sections of the same course. In practice, different people can be responsible for each of the three aspects of standards in a given agency. The result is that in the United States the situation is very complex, and to date very little is being done about standards or about any co-ordination of them.

With standards it is possible to compare Adult Education in various parts of the United States, even to compare standards in two or more countries. It is possible that standards can be set by researchers in Comparative Adult Education and then they can determine whether similar individuals or groups in different countries are relating to the standards.

Methodology/Design for Comparative Adult Education Research Project

The methodology or design of a Comparative Adult Education research project extends from the beginning statement of purpose through the analysis of results which is similar to research projects in other fields of education. The methodology is a plan for conducting research and implementing
standards. The stages of a research project may be stated in the form of methodological questions such as given below. The responses to the questions reflect the standards for that stage of a specific research project, and thus they become the benchmark from which to identify change.

1. What is the importance of the project?
2. What is the objective of the project?
3. What are the assumptions underlying the project?
4. In what ways will the project contribute to principles or practice of the field of Adult Education?
5. In what ways will the design or methodology enable the project to be completed?
6. What evidence or data is required to achieve the goals of the project?
7. Where is the data accessible?
8. In which two or more countries are comparable data accessible?
9. What is the best method accessible for collecting the data?
10. How much of the data can be juxtaposed so that a comparison may be made of selected factors?
11. How may the similarities and dissimilarities be identified?
12. How are the results disseminated, and from whom is there feedback?
13. How is the research project evaluated?

For the responses to be useful as a basis for comparison the standards must be stated in terms that include the nature of, and the extent or level of the content. There are general guidelines to be considered in setting, implementing and assessing standards for any research project, including Comparative Adult Education. The following guidelines may be considered:

* **Credibility** - the standards are to be credible to the audience of the research project.

* **Internal consistency** - the standards of the stages are to be consistent with each of
the other stages of the research project.

* Flexibility - without losing the rigor, flexibility is to be provided to adapt to foreseeable developments for which adjustment may be made in the research project.

* Constant and continuous monitoring - as the research project develops there is a critical need for monitoring at each stage.

These guidelines may be considered when responding to the above questions at each stage of the research project.

Methods for a Comparative Adult Education Research Project

There are sometimes differences in the use of the terms, methodology and methods. This presentation is concerned with the overall methodology or design of a Comparative Adult Education research project. The methods used in conducting a Comparative Adult Education research project are only a part of the overall methodology. (See question 9 on Methodology in the upper chapter).

The criteria for the selection of methods for a research project in Comparative Adult Education are the same as for a research project in other fields of education. Some of the criteria are reflected in questions such as the ones stated below, following the same format used earlier in this presentation for the stages of methodology of research project. Standards for the selection of a method are reflected by the responses to these questions. Questions that reflect criteria for the selection of a method for a research project may include:

1) In what way is it appropriate for the collection of the data?

2) Are the time and place appropriate for the use of it?

3) In what ways does it facilitate feedback or interaction?

4) What is its cost effectiveness?

5) To what extent are the support services for it, such as facilities and equipment accessible? 6) What are the ethical and political implications of it, and are they acceptable to the sponsors
as well as others involved?

7) What aspects of it are unique for the research project?

The choice of a research method depends on the specific topic of the research project. Recognizing that each method has its unique strengths and weaknesses, more than one method may be used. Decisions have to be made to whether to use qualitative or quantitative techniques, and the issues of reliability, objectivity and validity must also be addressed. Likewise instruments and statistical techniques are to be selected for recording and analyzing.

The recent developments in technology have made a contribution in facilitating research in Comparative Adult Education. While technology is not a method per se, it provides particularly useful tools for recording data that have been collected and operates as an efficient and effective means for analyzing data consistent with the research design.

Societal Influences in Comparative Adult Education

An intra-national Comparative Adult Education study may have many societal influences external to the project that affect the topic being compared. The influences may be even more pronounced in a research project at the international level involving two or more countries. One of the many societal influences on a Comparative Adult Education research project is the different educational systems in each country. For example, the United States Constitution relegates education as an exclusive right of the states and not the Federal government, whereas in most other countries the Federal government has control in varying degrees. This factor impacts on Adult Education.

A second societal influence that is difficult to control is the language of various countries. While there are thesauruses such as the UNESCO IBE Education Thesaurus (1991), and Terminology of Adult Education, a 24-language dictionary (Hovenberg), barriers remain. The statement on translation by Jutte in this volume provides a discussion on bridging between languages. Languages differences do require consideration in a Comparative Adult Education research project.

A third societal influence on a research project is the cultural environment. While it may be possible to conduct a Comparative Education research project that is cultural free, it is not probable.

It may be possible, however, to control the effects of these societal influences and to select and develop research projects where cultural factors are minimal. The researchers considering influences must be aware of subtleties particularly in this area.

In Comparative Adult Education, when societal influences such as the ones cited above may be impossible or difficult to control, it may be possible to identify the influence of them on the research project. In some cases, it may be appropriate to defer the study rather than conduct one that does not meet the research criteria. It may be possible to identify uncontrollable influences and by a
deductive process determine the influence in the research project and then incorporate it into the statement of findings.

When the researcher has developed the standards that are expected, it may then be possible to identify or describe the control and/or the possible societal influence on the stages of the project and, finally, the results. The sensitivity and specific competency of the researcher are particularly important in this area of influences.

It is clear, however that the data collected are probably only a part of the data available and accordingly the findings are limited. Generalizations may be construed by the researcher. The responses to the listed questions of methodology and method provide the standards of each stage which together form the standard for the entire research project.

The first two aspects, setting and implementation of standards for Comparative Adult Education Research, have been discussed. The third aspect of standards is assessment. The concern for assessment is addressed in Landmarks in Adult Education (Charters, Hilton 1989, pp. 187-188) in the summary of the responses to the topic Evaluation Standards, Criteria, Validation Processes of the eight Landmark Programs in Landmarks, as follows:

* The most visible finding about the evaluative selections of these programs is that formal evaluation, especially of a variety that might involve measurement, was hardly employed.

* No statement on the subject of evaluating student work is more sweeping or more revealing than that found in the study about the Swedish Study Circles: "The whole notion of evaluation and standards contradicts the professed ethos of the study circle". But apart from evaluation of student work, we notice other apparent lapses in evaluative data collection. Most programs have some records of participation rates (although by no means all), but we rarely see any examples here of measurements of learning (nor, let us say, as measures of student work but as measures of teacher or program effectiveness), nor of qualitative data in which participants might describe the learning processes which they experienced.

Since these programs were selected as International Landmarks, it is somewhat discouraging to consider what the policy and procedures of programs of perhaps lesser recognition are doing in the area of evaluation and standards in Adult Education in the United States and elsewhere. Also, the data base of research in assessment in Comparative Adult Education is only recently becoming identified and expanded.

It is noted that in this article the concern is not with the assessment of learning by adults but concerned with the assessing of a Comparative Adult Education research project. Moreover, it may be that the attitude of the educators of adults towards both types of activities may be somewhat similar.
As previously stated, assessing and evaluating are necessary to know if the set standards are implemented and achieved. Standards for each of the stages of a research project previously cited are the benchmarks for assessing its achievement. The adherence to the standard of each of the parts in total becomes the assessment of the research project. The setting, implementing and assessing of standards need to be increasingly addressed. The rigor with which this is done affects the quality of Comparative Adult Education research.

Fundamentally the standards for methodology and method in Comparative Adult Education research are the same as those in other fields of education.

This presentation has pointed out the lack of past attention to standards in Comparative Adult Education research, the limited literature on the subject and the growing interest in the issue. The topic of standards has been examined from the perspective of the three aspects, namely, setting, implementing and evaluating. Standards must be specified for each stage (include methods) in the methodology/design of a project. The current state of the application of standards to Comparative Adult Education, the unique aspects and problems of their application together with some possible solutions are discussed.

Standards in Comparative Adult Education research is a relatively new topic of interest to educators of adults. It is encouraging that, through the activities of ISCAE, the standards in Comparative Adult Education Research are given some priority.

References


Charters, A. N. (1986): Perspectives of Adult Education. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University SUPF


