

## Quality for Adult Educators? A Swedish outlook

### Introduction

Every European country is undergoing a major transformation, due to global competition, affecting all societal sectors. In March 2000, the European Council affirmed that Europe moved into the Knowledge Age, implying extensive changes for cultural, economic and social life.<sup>1</sup> Education and lifelong learning is perceived to lie at the heart of the transformation towards a knowledge-based economy and society.

Lifelong learning has without exception become the prevailing educational ideology of our post-industrial time functioning as the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts for all EU citizens,. Thus, not only youth education of good quality has to be guaranteed but adults must also have access to educational opportunities to constantly renew their skills or develop new ones to handle the challenges of today, and actively participate in the shaping of Europe's future. According to policy making rhetoric the future challenges for the European Union, is to create a joint labour market by enabling well educated and trained citizens to take their qualifications across borders.<sup>2</sup>

Fruitful lifelong learning opportunities in the diverse field of adult education need to be supported by well qualified educators. Educators' role and status is also dependent on how well they are qualified for their task and the recognition they obtain. Quality and professional development – professionalization - of adult educators are core issues of current research run by the European Research Group on Competencies in the Field of Adult and Continuing Education which was set up by the German Institute of Adult Education (DIE). (Ekkehard & Lattke 2008)

In 2007 the DIE Group initiated the European Conference “*Qualifying the Actors in Adult and Continuing Education (Q-ACT)*”. One of the aims of the conference was “to review the state of the art in Europe, share experience and good practice”, which resulted in a survey with the same title. Based on empirical research carried out by a Delphi-Method, the survey started up in 2008 in several European countries.<sup>3</sup> Among other outcomes, the project is expected to

a. identify a profile of core competencies for educators/teachers in Adult and Continuing Education

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<sup>1</sup> Commission of the European Communities (2000). *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission. *Education & Training* ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/index_en.htm)) Last update :14 May 2009

<sup>3</sup> From October 2009 the study is carried out in the shape of the EU-funded project “QF2TEACH - Qualified to Teach” in which 7 countries are involved, namely Germany, Sweden, Holland, Switzerland, Italy, Romania, and Poland. Every national partner is responsible for the survey in respective country. (German Institute for Adult Education, 2009. *Qualified to Teach*)

In the Delphi-Method research design, experts in the participating countries will be asked in several waves, to analyse data collected both with standardised as well as with open questions, using both quantitative and qualitative procedures. The collective elaboration of the empirical data in the Delfi-procedure is aiming to facilitate the compilation of future-oriented core competences, striving towards a consensus among the experts in the involved countries. (Linstone & Turoff eds., 2002. *The Delphi Method. Techniques and Applications.*)

- b. create knowledge which may support the introduction and establishment of measures for the education and qualification of adult educators,
- c. raise the professional abilities of adult educators and
- d. specify the meaning of “professionalization” in the adult education field.

Since 2008, measures are taken throughout Europe to various schemes for increasing transparency on qualification levels in terms of learning outcomes – what a learner knows, understands and is able to do – in order to link them to the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) (European Communities, 2008).<sup>4</sup> EQF is an initiative to create a translating facility for referencing academic degrees and other learning qualifications among EU member states. When the decision on EQF is taken, all countries participating in the process will pursue with national decisions on how to adapt the national qualifications systems to the overarching European framework. Traditionally, qualifications are mostly described in terms of input such as length of study or type of institution attended. The EQF, on the contrary, emphasises the results of learning, in terms of knowledge, skills and competences, rather than focusing on inputs such as length of study.

The idea of learning outcomes instead of the traditional view is also reflected in the German proposal in following normative manner: "it is important what people are able to do and not where they have learned it."<sup>5</sup> Obviously, the way EQF considers qualifications aims to capture the entire width of theoretical, practical and social skills that is regarded of great relevance to fulfil another overall objective, namely that of achieving and maintaining employability. The qualification framework is, at the same time, a concrete recognition of the fact that Europe's education and training systems are so diverse. The EQF shift to learning outcomes marks a willingness to facilitate comparison and cooperation between countries and institutions. The question needed to be asked is whether the recommended eight reference levels (See annex II in EQF, European Communities, 2008,) confine really an individual's full capacity and not just what can be measured within the particular frame of reference.

### ***Ta panta rei***

Heraclitus' statement *Ta Panta Rei* ("Everything Floats") could be regarded as a suitable description of our time's all-encompassing changes. Everything is changing and does so at a rapid pace. The way we understand learning, where and how it takes place, and for what kinds of purposes, is subjected to comprehensive reviews. Teaching and learning methods are expected to adapt to various interests, needs and demands of individuals and groups in our highly culturally and ethnically diverse societies. Not least, educators' skills need to be raised, adapted and developed if they are to be in line with *the state of the art* pedagogical thinking. Furthermore, adult educators are identified as one of the key target groups in the Commission Communication on Adult Learning, which urge Member States to put in place initial and continuing professional measures to qualify and up-skill the adult-learning staff in Europe. (Ekkehard, & Lattke 2008)

Knowledge, skills and aptitudes are concerned to be a major factor in the EU's innovation, productivity and competitiveness of the European workforce. The process of globalization, the rapid pace of change, and the continuous roll-out of new technologies call for every citizen of Europe not only to keep on their specific job-related skills up-to-date, but also

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<sup>4</sup> The EQF is an EU-wide tool which links countries' qualifications systems together, acting as a translation device to make qualifications more readable and comparable across Europe. The EQF has two principal aims: to promote citizens' mobility between countries and to facilitate their lifelong learning. (European Communities, 2008. *The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)*).

<sup>5</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/news1245\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/news1245_en.htm)

possess some generic competences that will enable them to adapt to change. Apparently, there is a need for new skills and competences for mastering the new digital world. Furthermore, there is a need to gaining a deeper understanding of the opportunities, challenges and even ethical questions posed by new technologies.

This kind of reasoning about the role of education is significant for today's education policy rhetoric at a European level. It can best be illustrated by the case of the European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, adopted by the Council and the European Parliament, at the end of 2006. The aim of this framework is to identify and define the key competences that citizens require for their personal fulfilment, social inclusion, active citizenship and employability in our knowledge-based society.

*In this climate of rapid change, there is increasing concern about our social cohesion. There is a risk that many Europeans feel left behind and marginalised by globalisation and the digital revolution. The resulting threat of alienation implies a need to nurture democratic citizenship; it requires people to be informed and concerned about their society and active in it. The knowledge, skills and aptitudes that everyone needs must change as a result.<sup>6</sup>*

In what follows, I will introduce some concepts frequently used in the current education policy discourse, which inevitably may initiate changes in the content and infrastructure of national education systems.

## **Competences as “learning outcome”**

The concept of competence has in recent years instigated its intrusion into the regular educational vocabulary.

According to a widespread definition, learning means “*relatively sustainable changes in an individual's competence as a result by the individual's interaction with the environment.*” (Ellström 1996, p 147, my translation). Classical learning psychology perceives learning as “*the change of inner and outer behaviour*”. The scope is widened in modern cognitive psychology which identifies learning with “*changes of the individual's conceptions, knowledge (mental models) or intellectual skills.*” Ellström goes further and connects learning to individual action and competence. The substance of learning then becomes a change in the individual competence which he defines as “*an individual's potential capacity to act in relation to a certain task, situation and context, namely the ability to successfully (according to their own or others' criteria) perform a piece of work, including ability to identify, exploit and, if possible, extend the space of interpretation, action and set of values that the work allows.*” (Ellström 1992, p. 21, my translation)

Competence as a concept and its more powerful form, *key competence*, has its roots in the information technology explosion of the 1970's that raised issues regarding what basic knowledge and skills people need to cope with in order to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing society. At the same time, key skills are also understood as being “keys” necessary

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<sup>6</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning. Official Journal of the European Union L394. ([http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l\\_394/l\\_39420061230en00100018.pdf](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_394/l_39420061230en00100018.pdf))

for opening more specific skills. There are many attempts to define and determine the concept of competence <sup>7</sup>

Apparently, the concept of competence is loaded with different meanings depending on the perspective from which it is approached. For example, philosophers are interested in capturing the timeless human competencies and address key competencies that are generally independent of culture, context and personal characteristics. For sociologists, competencies imply empowerment of individuals and groups to preserve their autonomy and exercise their rights without infringing on that of others, and to cope in and across various social fields. The economist, finally, calculate the value of skills in the workplace and labour market and usually talk about competencies that the working force need in order "*to increase productivity and succeed in the labor market, with success defined in the 'maximization of income' and 'return to education' in financial terms*". They also put emphasis on knowledge and skills which result in increased competitiveness in the market. (Zhou Nan-Zhao, p. 5)<sup>8</sup>

From an interdisciplinary view the notion of competence is perceived enclosing the external requirements, e.g., from the labour market, as well as the individual's own abilities in terms of knowledge and skills of cognitive, practical and social character along with ethical principles, emotions and attitudes. Ultimately, the notion of competence is used to signify an individual's ability to carry out an activity and/or to deal with challenges and complex demands in a successful way. Though, such an "out-turned" ability's functionality<sup>9</sup> is depended on the support of other "inward" mental abilities, capacities and dispositions. (Rychen and Tiana 2004; Ellström 1992)

"Key competence" is another term that nowadays is used frequently in various policy documents. If **competence** is defined as a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and mental abilities appropriate to a particular situation for "*necessary for everyone*", **key competences** are "*those that support personal fulfilment, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment*" (OECD 2005; Commission of the European Communities 2005). It is, thus, unclear in what sense key competencies are "keys". A feasible interpretation might be that the key competences "opens" the way for more specific, including occupation-specific, skills. (Liedman 2008).

Although the concept *competence/key competence* has multitudinous usages, skills refer to a given ability and, ultimately, to a contingency and a disposition, required when performing a certain task which is based on specific knowledge. Proctor and Dutta (1995, p. 18) define skill

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<sup>7</sup> According to a source referenced by Sven-Eric Liedman (2008, *Nycklar till ett framgångsrikt liv? – Om EU:s nyckelkompetenser*, footnote 8) there are approximately 2000 definitions of competence, namely: Yvonne-Marie Ruedin, "Les clés pour l'emploi et l'arbre des compétences", Panorama nr 6/2002, s. 19 ([http://www.panorama.ch/pdf/2002/Heft\\_6\\_2002/pan2619.pdf](http://www.panorama.ch/pdf/2002/Heft_6_2002/pan2619.pdf)).

The difference between competence and skill is discussed by Tiana (2004) in an article about how to develop key competencies in education:

"From a strictly conceptual viewpoint, competence has a broader meaning than skill and many analysts consider a competence to include several skills. If we accept that distinction, then the concept of competence should be considered as broader, more general and a higher level of cognition and complexity than the concept skill." (p.73)

<sup>8</sup> Zhou Nan-Zhao: *Four 'Pillars of Learning' for the Reorientation and Reorganization of Curriculum: Reflections and Discussions*.

<sup>9</sup> "the quality or state of being functional; *especially* : the particular set of functions or capabilities associated with computer software or hardware or an electronic device" (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/FUNCTIONALITY>)

as “goal-directed, well-organized behavior that is acquired through practice and performed with economy of effort” (Winterton, Delamare - Le Deist & Stringfellow 2005, p. 12)

### **Professionalisation and professionalism**

The concept profession is used differently, like many others within the social sciences, depending on from what perspective it is approached. It is important however to make a distinction between professionalisation and professionalism which are sometimes used as synonyms. Professionalization refers to the aspirations for social position and status of a professional group, while professionalism focuses on the internal quality of a profession. Professionalism is dealing with the qualities and acquired skills of professionals - actual competences - necessary to successfully exercise the profession. Englund (1997) goes a step further and proposes the use of the concept *didactic competence*, in order to avoid confusion which the use of the terms professionalization and professionalism might cause. According to Ekholm (1997), the professional level of a profession is determined by factors dealing with

- a. the specific knowledge base of the profession
- b. the responsibility for the development of the profession,
- c. the existence of professional ethics
- d. the control of who may exercise the profession and
- e. the degree of professional autonomy

Certainly, Ekholm’s reasoning refers to how the professionalism of primary and secondary school teachers is perceived in relation to the above criteria, but it can also be used to treat adult educators as a professional group. The traditional use of the concept of teachers’ professionalization has stressed the proficiency of teaching a subject. Teachers have had the task of disseminating knowledge but there are very few teachers who are specialists in their fields of knowledge. Teachers’ professional knowledge has, thus a wide and generic direction, not least because they face groups of students with different needs and conditions. At the same time teaching requires specific knowledge, e.g. on how learning takes place in relation to learners’ developmental needs, on how the educational materials should be structured and processed in order to promote learning and, additionally, knowledge of human behaviour in group contexts. This approach of the teaching profession has emphasized the didactical aspects of teaching, taking teachers’ subject knowledge for granted.

Regarding the responsibility and initiative for the development of professional content and direction, as well as control over who gets access to the profession, teachers as a collective seem to have very little influence. This is also true in the case of the profession’s ethics since teachers, as professional collectives, have no control and sanction mechanisms or legal obligation concerning observance and compliance of the ethical principles. On the contrary, the degree of professional autonomy, in the sense that no other than the teacher determines how to think and act in a teaching situation, seems to be relatively high. Due to this circumstance teachers are often considered as professionals. (ibid)

Development of professional teaching competencies is mainly linked to the formal teacher training. A modern professional education at an academic level is arranged on the basis of knowledge that is believed future teachers need to master to facilitate others learning. At the same time it is expected that this knowledge will create a foundation for continuing learning (Docherty 1996; Folkesson 2005, p. 67). The skilled teacher is, therefore, expected to take a professional responsibility for his or her own continuing learning process which is supposed to be mostly of informal character. It is informal because it is not institutionalized or

prestructured in a set curricula and model in order to achieve the predefined knowledge. However, this does not mean that informal learning takes place only unconsciously and unintentionally. Informal learning is also a highly purposeful and autonomous activity (Cross 2007; Deer Richardson & Wolfe, eds. 2001; Bron-Wojciechowska 1996).

How teachers relate to their own professional (competence) development has been the subject of the so-called *Teachers thinking research movement* that focuses on teachers' thinking about their own experience from practice (Larsson 2006; Goodson 2005; Carlgren, Handal & Sveinung 1994; Kelchtermans 1993; Schön 1983). Teachers' professional development is a lifelong process during which the individual skills go hand-in-hand with the overall school development (Fullan & Hargreaves 1992).

Teachers' professional core consists of potential competencies whose development gradually takes place during the course of their professional life. Such a development model has been presented by Kugel (1993) who has studied the university teachers' professional development. Kugel's model indicates that teachers initially focus on mastering their role in the classroom (Stage I: competencies of the **self**). When this was successfully completed they focus their attention on how to understand and organize their subject in order to convey it (Stage II: The competences of the instruction **subject**). After that the teacher felt familiar with their own educational role and confident enough with the subject, so that he/she could pay attention to students' abilities and learning needs (Stage III: **student**-centered didactic competences).

Although the model gives the impression that the phases of development follow a certain order, it is far from certain that is always the case. However, it is reasonable to assume that the usual pattern is as Kugel proposes it. Fundamental in this case is that the model captures the qualitative leap that occurs during the changeover to the third step. What such a model emphasizes is the restructuring of teacher competencies signifying a perspective alteration, from their own instruction to student learning.

Ultimately, the model describes a teacher's professional evolution by which a basic ability appears to managing the relationship between the three competence dimensions of teaching. Mastering the relationship between self, subject and student creates conditions and space for teachers to act, as well as freedom to choose among a large repertoire of teaching strategies depending on the educational situation in question. Professional experience and the ability to reflect on one's own professional practice is of great importance.

The cited model could be used as a structuring and classified principle of adult educators' generic competencies. The different stages of an educator's professional development may constitute a coherent and sound, although broad, set of key competencies related to the different skills that teachers need to acquire in order to fulfil their tasks ("mission"?).

Adult educators' key competencies could be placed under Kugel's stages which can be perceived as three broad dimensions of an educator's competence profile. Instead of a long list of key competences related to specific subject domains should this profile embrace sets of competences integrated across learning domains.

Another set of competence categories is listed within the previously mentioned Q-ACT Project, namely:

1. personal competencies
2. social competencies
3. didactical competencies

4. methodological competencies
5. societal and institutional competencies (Ekkehard, & Lattke 2008, p. 54-55)

The DeSeCo Project introduces yet another conceptual framework for key competencies classifying them into three broad categories:

***First**, individuals need to be able to use a wide range of tools for interacting effectively with the environment: both physical ones such as information technology and socio-cultural ones such as the use of language. They need to understand such tools well enough to adapt them for their own purposes – to use tools interactively.*

***Second**, in an increasingly interdependent world, individuals need to be able to engage with others, and since they will encounter people from a range of backgrounds, it is important that they are able to interact in heterogeneous groups.*

***Third**, individuals need to be able to take responsibility for managing their own lives, situate their lives in the broader social context and act autonomously.<sup>10</sup>*

Based on the work of the DeSeCo project Tiana (2004) makes a tentative proposal for key competencies for education systems dividing them in two main groups, namely

- a) **curriculum-bounded competencies**, such as ability to communicate with other, basic science/math skills, computer literacy and media competence
- b) **cross-curricular competencies**, which include metacognitive competencies, intra-personal competencies, interpersonal competencies, and positional competencies (coping with complexity and dealing with diversity/change).

Hoskins & Fredriksson (2008) line up Tianas proposal in the following Table 1:

Table 1: Key competencies for education systems: a tentative proposal  
Source: (Tiana, 2004 p. 51)

<b>Curriculum- bounded competencies</b>	<b>Cross-curricular competencies</b>
Ability to communicate with others, both orally and in writing: - oral and written mastery of the mother tongue - reading comprehension - mastery of at least one foreign language	Metacognitive competencies - problem solving - developing learning strategies - critical judgement - divergent thinking
Basic mathematics skills and numeracy	Intrapersonal competencies - management of motivation and emotions - self-concept - developing personal autonomy
Computer literacy and media competence	Interpersonal competencies - capacity of joining and functioning democratically in groups - ability to relate well to other people - ability to play by the rules and to

<sup>10</sup> OECD: *Definition and Selection of Key Competencies (DeSeCo): Executive Summary*. (p.5)  
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/61/35070367.pdf>

	manage and resolve conflicts
Capacity of situating in the world of the individual - knowledge of the natural and social world - development of civic attitudes	Positional competencies - ability for coping with complexity - dealing with diversity and change

The competencies mentioned above do evidently not specifically refer to educators but are competencies which all individuals are expected to cultivate because of the widely accepted notion that a well-educated, knowledgeable, highly qualified citizenry is seen as playing an eminent role in facing the challenges of the present and the future. The development of these competencies is linked to notions of lifelong learning for every citizen and to notions of how adult learning should be organised and carried out. Not least, the kind of knowledge, skills, and competencies which are important to individuals and to society as a whole, affect the adult educators' professional competencies, knowledge and skills. But who is the adult educator and what kind of competencies he/she is in need of?

## The adult educator

The notion "adult educator" indicates a broad range of individuals with the common characterization "one who helps adults learn". If the description is appropriate then the group *adult educators* should include

- a. professional adult educators who have been prepared specifically for this vocation, particularly within formal educational institutions
- b. group leaders in non-formal education including voluntary associations
- c. training officers and staff administrators in corporations.

Except the first category above, adult educators have little or no formal instruction preparing them for the assignment to "help adults learn" (Henschke 1998)

"Formal" means here a teacher programme regulated in the Law, which gives access to a profession that require qualifications based on formal studies. This doesn't mean that adult educators without formal adult teacher training lack qualifications and skills needed to help adults learn. They may well have acquired them either through self-directed studies or participation in various specially designed courses for adult educators.

Below, I will present two major groups of Swedish adult educators and how they prepare for their professional task: study circle leaders in popular education and teachers in the formal adult education sector.

### Study Circle Leaders

The training offered to study circle leaders by the Swedish Popular Adult Education Associations ("Studieförbund")<sup>11</sup> is the only and almost obligatory preparation for the task of "teaching" adults in study circles<sup>12</sup>. Circle Leadership training is an internal matter for each

<sup>11</sup> *Studieförbund* are nation-wide non-formal study organizations for adults. Today there are nine study associations which are supported by the State. Each study association has a more or less marked profile depending on which popular movements/organizations are members in the association.

<sup>12</sup> The study circle "studiecirkeln" is the most common form of learning activity in Popular Adult Study Associations. In the study circles participants learn different subjects in accordance to their learning needs and wishes. Every year about 310 000 circles are organized all over the country with a total of 2.5 million

Studieförbundet and adapted to its respective pedagogical vision and learning activity profile. It is therefore based on specific ideas of what it means to educate adults and an equally determined view of the human being and learning as well as the importance of education for the individual fulfilment. Since Popular Education ("Folkbildning") is largely financed with public funds, the State also expects some results as a legitimizing basis for its support, such as strengthening democracy and civic virtues, compensating educational disparities, and broadening people's interest and participation in culture. Beside political motives of equality and justice, the State also raises a range of "developing areas" of great relevance for popular adult education. Through studies and cultural activities, adults are given opportunities to be fostered into responsible individuals and citizens. The idea of *bildning* ("Bildung") unites and permeates everything from studies in study circles to cultural activities, implemented by the popular education organizations together with their partners. It implies an obligation to use the aid for the development of the participants' abilities in accordance with their needs. (Borgström, Gougoulakis & Höghielm 1998; Gougoulakis 2001, 2006; Gougoulakis & Bogataj 2007)

Popular Adult Education's view of *bildning* and knowledge embraces all people. Historically, the Swedish popular education had a special status in the educational system and acted as an alternative that also affected the pedagogical thinking in the formal education sector. Its features are explained if we consider the special relationship between the autonomous popular education movement and the democratic social movements - some of the latter could be regarded as protest movements. Education was for the social movements a struggling tool for better living conditions, a more equal and humane society.

Popular adult education organizations' pedagogical and ideological profile is presented in pamphlets and target documents, and hopefully forms the basis of not only the training content of the circle leaders but also the actual learning process in study circles. Characteristic of a learning process, in accordance to popular education pedagogical tradition, is the high influence of student participants, the experience-based learning, the social interaction between the participants and the deliberative and reflective conversation. Learning in the study circles should ideally be cooperative.

Popular education activities are not driven by curricula, syllabi or marking scales but are, nevertheless systematic. Regularity implies that the participants and the study circle leader, approved by the Popular adult education association, will come to an agreement on a structure, which includes learning outcomes, content, learning material and learning activities over a set period of time. A great pedagogical responsibility lies on circle leaders to create and maintain the interest of the participants to study the subject and motivate them to go into a collective learning process. This learning process is free but not arbitrary. Its character is shaped by the participants and the leader's intentions with learning.

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participants. (Since many people participate in more than one circle per year the real number of participants is estimated to between one and a half million to two million.)

The official view of popular education in the most recent Act of 1997 maintains that

*"(p)opular education is and should be free and voluntary. This free and voluntary popular educational work enables all to seek knowledge on the basis of their own experience, preferences and learning style, without limitation from demands for results, and without mechanisms of exclusion. The approach permits dialogue, involvement and questioning, without a preconceived framework. By reason of this, popular education fulfils a role not covered by any other educational institution, a role which also contributes to maintaining the vitality of democracy."* (Regeringens proposition 1997/98:115, p. 5 – my translation)

Who the circle leader is, what competencies are expected from a circle leader and why someone chooses to become a circle leader, is an almost unexplored field of research. This may seem remarkable considering the fact that popular education has a long tradition in Sweden. Popular adult education activities, as part of the country's adult education infrastructure, need to be further explored concerning the adult learners' study conditions and the quality improvement of the "adult-related" learning. Regarded as "professionals", Circle leaders, as well as other adult educators, are expected to imply a pedagogy that takes into account adults' expectations, assumptions, experiences and living conditions in the circle work (Andersson, E. 2001; 2006; Gougoulakis 2001; 2006). Evidently, it is impossible to equate the non-formal popular adult education with other formal adult education, but similarities may occur as the former compete, in some respects, with e.g. municipal adult education ("Komvux") in terms of courses offered and target groups. Against this background and in a situation where popular adult education is in search of a new identity in today's relatively vaguely outlined adult education landscape, more knowledge is needed on the characteristics of circle leadership. In addition to the research already carried out during the 1990s and 2000s (SOU 1996:159; SOU 2000:28; Andersson, P. 2006; SOU 2004:30) there is need for further research with focus on methodological aspects on learning-teaching processes relating to the circle leadership, and on different features of the multifaceted learning process in study circles, e.g. the nature and the effect of popular adult learning on civic virtues, on "civic disciplinary", democratic fostering and power relations in society (compare Larsson 2006).

The distinctive pedagogical character of popular adult education and the renewal of its contents and working methods can, after all, be maintained by the dedicated efforts of its staff. For the study associations, the qualification and skill development of their circle leaders is a key factor for the enhancement and assurance of the quality of learning (see prop. 2005/06:192, p. 60-62).

### **Adult Educators in the formal adult education**

Adult Education in Sweden is wide-ranging and offered at different levels by a variety of operators. The adult educational landscape is undergoing major changes, both organizational and pedagogical-didactic. An increased demand for adult teaching and training skills proves to be the result of changing views about the importance of learning for the individuals and the evolution of working life as well. Nowadays, an adult educator is currently involved in many tasks which requires a unique ability to cope with learning situations with adult participants, like, for instance, analyzing educational needs, planning and managing the training needs of adult participants of different ages and in different environments, and developing studying methods tailored to adult learners' individual living conditions. This is particularly important to take into account in the growing number of vocational training programmes for adults - an area expected to expand further.

Thus, the framing of the adult education area is distinguished and looks different from that in youth schools. The formal adult education is characterized by great flexibility as a result of the attention it must pay to adult participants' life experiences, not least their experiences from working life. The government bill for the current teacher education (prop 1999/2000:135, p. 23) states:

*The Committee proposes that for those students who intend to teach adults, there must be specific specialties relating to the education of adults. The Government agrees with the Committee's proposal assuming that training of this kind will be organized. The government also believes, like the Committee, that pedagogy of adults should be included in the general pedagogical subject area. (my translation)*

The bill states as well that the new (year 2000) teacher training will help teachers to teach in different kinds of schools and postulate that prospective teachers during their training will acquire relevant knowledge on adult learning.

However, the results of a survey, conducted by The National Centre for Lifelong Learning ([www.encell.se](http://www.encell.se)) in autumn 2003, showed that there was no teacher training college, of those who answered the survey, which offered students a specialization in the field of adult education. Even within the general education course appeared this topic to be limited.

Encell's mapping was verified later by an evaluation **of the new teacher-training programmes and the follow-up of the reform in teacher training conducted by the National Agency for Higher Education in 2004** (HSV 2005:17 R). According to the evaluation none of the teacher education colleges in the country even designed a specialization with focus on adult education and learning.

Apparently, adult teacher training is marginalized in comparison to primary and secondary teachers' training. The HSV's evaluation (Part 1, p. 126) pointed out that this subject area not only is "in backwater", but preparation for teaching adults also seems to be "an almost forgotten" story (ibid, s 168).

The current Inquiry HUT07 (SOU 2008:109) on a new teacher education programme is also addressing adult education. It states that the training of adults embraces several educational settings with different needs of teaching skills. It notes that the largest volume of adult education takes place within enterprises and government agencies and that it is common for teachers working in this large area, but hitherto there are no formal teacher training requirements to be employed as an educator. The study also notes that adult education in general, is "a large market" for teacher-trained people, and believes there is every reason for teacher training institutions to point out these possibilities for becoming teachers as well as for employers in search of qualified educators. The Inquiry proposes a teacher education programme, with a common core of educational science, aiming to give future teachers a thorough foundation on which they can build during their career by continuous development of their professional skills that also should be useful outside the compulsory school system. (p. 285-290).

Today's formal adult education is guided by the Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system (Lpf 94). According to that, "adult education in municipal adult education and the national state schools for adults (SSV) shall, taking account of the pupils' earlier education and experience, deepen and develop the pupils' knowledge as a basis for working life and further studies as well as for participation in civic life" (Lpf94, p. 8). Knowledge goals are the same for both young persons and adults, but course contents, duration and emphasis do not need to be identical. (ibid, p.9)

As for the teachers in adult education the Curriculum provides, inter alia, that they shall

- *take as the starting point each individual pupil's needs, preconditions, experience and thinking,*
- *reinforce the pupils' self-confidence as well as their willingness and ability to learn,*
- *make clear the values and perspectives that knowledge is based on and encourage pupils to take a position on how their knowledge can be used,*
- *co-operate with other teachers in the work of achieving the goals of education,*
- *use in the education the knowledge and experience of social and working life which the pupils have or acquire during their education,*
- *take account of developments in pedagogical research and relevant subject areas, and apply these in the education. (p. 13)*

Curricula for the compulsory (Lpo 94) and the non-compulsory school system (Lpf 94) have a similar structure regarding the values, objectives and tasks. A comparison between the two shows a remarkable difference in the perceptions of students' learning. Lpo 94 states that schooling shall "*promote learning in which the individual is stimulated to acquire knowledge*", while Lpf 94 focuses onto "*disseminate information*". Given the fact that there is an established andragogic "truth", that adult learners are likely to be more mature and motivated to acquire knowledge (e.g. Knowles 1990), it is remarkable that the author could formulate the task of adult education in the curriculum in such an obviously uninformed manner.

It should be stressed that the Inquiry HUT07 in its review of the various forms of adult education concludes that these are too different to allow a specific teacher training for adult education. At the same time it considers that the various proposed teacher specialisations cover the need of educators for adult learning settings. Regarding the formal adult education and its tasks the Inquiry comes to the conclusion that "*in principle, special teaching competence is not needed for municipal adult education in addition to relevant teacher specializations in different subjects, although it is advantageous if an adult educational approach could permeate the core courses (in teacher training programmes). For basic adult education even primary school teachers can be considered as far as basic language and math development is concerned.*" (SOU 2008:109, p. 287 – my translation)

Despite the emphasis of how large the adult education labour market is the Inquiry also highlights the need for more research concerning the field of adult education, as well as opportunities for academic institutions, where such research is already undertaken, to put an adult learning profile on their teacher training. (ibid, p. 290)

### ***Skills requirements/competencies for educators***

Let us take a glance on how the Inquiry HUT07 (SOU 2008:109) addresses the issue of competencies for a "*Sustainable teacher education*".

The Inquiry analyses the skills requirements for all categories of teachers and with respect to their essence divides them into three levels:

Level I constitutes of an ***overall dimension*** composed of four perspectives regarded to setting their stamp on all teacher education. These are

- a scientific and critical approach
- a historical perspective,
- an international dimension, and
- an ICT-perspective meant to function as a pedagogic resource.

The scientific and critical approach is intended to foster future teachers' normative attitudes as to make them "*aware of and able to evaluate different educational methods and theories*". The historical and international perspectives broaden the students' knowledge in time and space to counteracting a narrowly contemporary and national view of school and learning. The last perspective is regarded as an educational resource and "*an absolutely essential part of a teacher education programme*" in today's digitalized society.

Level II encompasses according the Inquiry's opinion, a certain set of knowledge and skills that all teachers need, regardless of their specialisation and type of school. These consist of the following eight content areas:

- The organisation of education and its conditions, foundations of democracy
- Curriculum theory and didactics
- Theory of science, research methods and statistics
- Development and learning
- Special needs education
- Social relations, conflict management and leadership
- Assessment and grading
- Evaluation and development work (SOU 2008:109, p. 27)

The Inquiry conceives the above mentioned skills and knowledges as the core of educational science .worth one year of full-time studies.

Level III comprises knowledge and skills specific to teachers in a certain age category or type of school. The Inquiry stresses the importance of "*good knowledge of the subject they teach*" and of the didactical perspective with regard to different subjects and student groups – "*subject didactics*".<sup>13</sup>

### **Quality of adult educators and the art of measuring something that is beautiful**

Any systematic educational activity in which the State is involved includes elements of governance and control (Lindensjö & Lundgren (2005).

The control can be implemented either through rules or by targets. Governance by rules was replaced in the 1990s with overall objectives. As a result, the direct control of public business became indirect. The governance nowadays consists of monitoring and controlling of target fulfillment through evaluation procedures and quality reports from all levels in educational institutions.

The responsibility to develop quality controlling instruments has to be placed at an operational level. Monitoring and evaluation processes in the hands of the operatives can serve as a tool for quality improvement, provided that they have sufficient knowledge of the complexity of learning processes and the possibility to reflect on "*how, for what purpose and for whom evaluations are made*". The quality of educational environments should be a collective process in which the educators were directly involved and did participate on equal terms.

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<sup>13</sup> The Inquiry HUT07 proposes a teacher education programme with a common core of educational science ("Utbildningsvetenskap") and a number of specialisations. Two new professional degrees, for primary school teachers and secondary school teachers, are proposed to replace the present single degree.

It is a process of participation, communication and reflection on the business and its development. Although it is difficult to define quality and perhaps even more difficult to measure, it does not discourage conscious work to make things better. Performance criteria and benchmarks may have its importance, but what ultimately seems to promote the quality of an educational activity is the ability of the organisation to create conditions for the participants' collective search for it. Operational self-governance and self-regulation means great opportunities for quality work. Staff, leadership and participants can develop their own methods of quality development and assurance that are better adapted and integrated in their pedagogical context.

Work with quality development occurs everywhere in human enterprises and no one seriously questions the importance of such work. Thus, the biggest problem has been the definition of quality in service-producing sectors in general and in public education in particular. The reason is that the "product" of such activities is people's subjective experiences of need satisfaction. But let us examine what quality stands for and what possible meanings it might include.

*Quality* is usually defined as the opposite of *quantity* referring to the "nature" of something. Quality of an educational activity is something good - but what is that "good". Quality may be perceived to stand for either a way we approach a given task, the inherent value of the task or/and an activity designed to do a task better. Awareness and knowledge of what quality is in an activity become extremely important today. But if we do not know what quality is, it is tricky to work to improve it.

Quality as a concept is at the heart of the discussion and its meaning depends on the context in which it appears. The word quality was rare in education policy texts before the 1990s, a period associated with a socio-ideological climate in which the liberal market thinking was totally hegemonic in every public sphere. New Public Management is the generic name for the new market economy inspired paradigm. (Karlsson Vestman & Andersson 2007; Nytel 2006; Stannegård 2007)

From the early 1990s quality became the signal word. Expressions such as quality control, quality assurance, quality development and quality assessment marked a paradigmatic shift in public discourse concerning the efficient production of goods and services. In particular, the inception of the concept of quality in education indicates the point of departure for a "new regime" of central management and control of publicly funded activities.

Nevertheless, quality is difficult to measure because it lacks visible references. This should not prevent us from trying to find ways to measure it. A definition to consider is e.g. the following:

*We define quality as a measurable characteristic of producing services which makes it possible to rank producers according to how well they can meet the officially agreed norms.*<sup>14</sup>

However, a *bildning* ("bildung") process includes qualitative aspects that are elusive in distinct scales. Usually they remain unexplored, and thus invisible. The core of this problem

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted by Susanne Weinberg (1995). "Kvalitetsmätningar – Ett verktyg eller ett otyg?". In: *På jakt efter sanningen. Om kvalitetsmätning och utvärdering*. Lärarförbundet, s. 18.

can be illustrated by the following reflection from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry *The Little Prince*:

If I have told you these details about the asteroid, and made a note of its number for you, it is on account of the grown-ups and their ways. When you tell them that you have made a new friend, they never ask you any questions about essential matters. They never say to you, *"What does his voice sound like? What games does he love best? Does he collect butterflies?"* Instead, they demand: *"How old is he? How many brothers has he? How much does he weigh? How much money does his father make?"* Only from these figures do they think they have learned anything about him. If you were to say to the grown-ups: *"I saw a beautiful house made of rosy brick, with geraniums in the windows and doves on the roof,"* they would not be able to get any idea of that house at all. You would have to say to them: *"I saw a house that cost \$20,000."* Then they would exclaim: *"Oh, what a pretty house that is!"*

(...)

They are like that. One must not hold it against them. Children should always show great forbearance toward grown-up people."<sup>15</sup>

## **Adult educators' competences and their quality: Research in progress**

Current concepts as lifelong learning, professionalization, qualification, validation, quality assurance, competencies etc, used in various policy documents, seem to interrelate in a specific way. They constitute a prevailing discourse - an articulated set of certain beliefs of the role of education in the making of the virtuous citizen. The policy documents are interconnected to each other like links in a chain. It is important to identify the voices heard in the discourse and reveal the assumptions and power claims (agenda) behind the authoritative as well as normative utterances addressing the public and telling what is good for everyone.

Everything one does has the ultimate goal of the good or happiness. Bildung/Bildung has its objectives regardless of where it proceeds. These objectives can be either the ultimate aim of our actions or be embedded in actions. The latter constitutes durable processes that the concept adult learning is designed to capture and describe. Adult learning activities are undertaken not primarily, at least not directly, towards measured learning outcomes (knowledge as a product) which normally is the destination of the productive skills. Adult education self conception is that of dealing with knowledge and learning as an active process not decided (fixed) in advance. Identification, though, of learning actions that lead to the realization of a given education's aims requires a determination of the aims in concern. It also requires a determination of the qualifications and skills – competencies - educators need in order to help participants realize their educational needs.

What kind of competences adult educators need to develop is dependent on of how clearly defined the concept of competence is and what the aims of different adult education activities are. What should the notion "adult educator", as indicating a broad range of individuals with the common characterization "one who helps adults learn", include of essential knowledge, abilities (competences, skills), attitudes and qualifications?

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<sup>15</sup> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: *The Little Prince* (<http://www.odaha.com/littleprince.php?f=English>)

It is not so easy to talk about the adult educator as something fixed and ready or a product from a specific training programme delimited in time and space. It would be more appropriate to talk about the adult educator as a *species under development*.

Adult educator is species in the making. It would make more sense to approach the nature of the adult educator's competence profile by inventing (constructing) developmental models of the same character as when trying to make sense of the development of human beings. A good start is to begin to identify adult educators' skills as manifested in the adult education field's various contexts, such as the EU-funded project Q2Teach are doing. Bringing together the results of the participating EU countries' Delphi-surveys, will hopefully broaden our understanding of what adult educators know or should know, to facilitate adult learners learning of good quality.



Undoubtedly, it takes time to become an adult educator in the sense that it takes time to develop the kind of potential ethics, in the Aristotelian sense, consisted of intellectual and moral abilities - *virtues*<sup>16</sup> – which puts a man/a woman in position to recognize in others or help others to realize their capacities, needs and life dreams.

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<sup>16</sup> The virtue of something, according to Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI), is its proper excellence. It is a habitual way of acting, not an emotion or a capacity, in combination with an excellent rational thinking (idea). Aristotle's Virtues consist of moral virtues (about character) and intellectual virtues (about thinking). The intellectual virtues, identified by Aristotle, are perceived as different ways the soul takes to arriving at truth. They are grouped in:

**a. Theoretical virtues** (*Nous*: intuitive understanding, *Episteme*: scientific knowledge, *Sophia*: philosophical wisdom)

**b. Productive virtues** (*Techne*:skills)

**c. Practical virtues** (*Phronesis*: practical wisdom, sensibility, prudence)

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