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**Professionals vs. role professionals:
Conceptualizing professionalism among
teachers of adults
Pathways towards Professionalisation**

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Professionals vs. role professionals: Conceptualizing professionalism among teachers of adults

Workshop B: Pathways towards Professionalisation

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1. Abstract

Similarly to other occupational fields, professionalism in adult education is being affected by rapid socio-political changes; dissimilarly, however, unfolding the concept of professionalism in adult education is more complex due to the vastness of the field itself and its peculiar features. This paper seeks to contribute to the re-conceptualisation of professionalism in today AE. It does so by revisiting traditional models of professionalism through the glasses of a 'role-professionalism' perspective. The authors' main argument is that conceptualising AE as 'one professional' field, as it is still often the case, is of little use when discussing professionalism among adult education practitioners. There exist, in fact, several occupations in the field of AE. Some of these occupations are semi-professions, with few having reached a full-fledged professional status and others progressing in this direction. However, for this to be possible it may be fruitful to focus on the professionals needs of adult education practitioners performing specific roles, e.g. teaching adults, rather than on the type of occupation they hold.

Key words: professionalism, professionalisation, adult education, teachers of adults

2. Introduction

With an increased focus on lifelong learning at both national and international levels comes a renovated interest in adult education (hereafter AE) as an important domain offering intentional learning opportunities for the 18+ population. Much attention is being paid, on the one hand, on the creation of opportunity structures for adults to engage in intentional learning activities and, on the other hand, on the professionalisation of those who earn their living in ensuring the quality of learning processes among adults. This professional group is differently addressed as adult educators, professional adult educators (Brockett, 1991) and, more recently, adult learning professionals, at least within the European context (Commission of the European Communities, 2007; Nuissl & Lattke, 2008; Beleid, Research voor Beleid & PLATO, 2008; Osborne, 2009).

However, clear identification of professional adult educators is problematic within various categorizations and several issues must be acknowledged. First, unfolding the concept of professionalism in AE is a complex matter due to the vastness of the field itself and its peculiar features (Jarvis & Associates, 1991; Cervero, 1992; Wilson, 1993; Merriam & Brockett, 2007; Nuissl & Lattke, 2008). The boundaries defining the status of practitioners in AE become even more blurred when we consider the 'hidden' groups of practitioners - those who earn their living in the field of AE but do not identify themselves, or are not identified by others, as adult educators. These 'hidden' groups exist because a variety of people practice AE on a voluntary basis, while earning their living elsewhere. Second, clear identification of who is a professional adult educator implies the recognition of the counter-part, i.e. non-professional adult educator. Obviously setting such boundaries then becomes a sensitive issue of who is to be included and who is not. Finally, some categories are policy-driven due to the predominant shift in focus on learning. However, borrowing policy lingo results into a conceptual confusion: the agency in learning is assigned to the learner, in education to the educator. As described by Merriam & Brockett (2007:6):

"Adult learning is a cognitive process internal to the learner; it is what the learner does in a teaching-learning transaction, as opposed to what the educator does".

Whether or not adult educators receive an economic reward, it is not 'learning' but 'education' that stands at the core of the service they provide and makes it possible to speak of the field of AE either as an occupation or profession!

Against this background it has to be mentioned that the debate on professionalism in the field of AE is nothing new. There is, in fact, a relatively vast literature on this topic that, at least in the United States, dates back to the early 1990s (Jarvis & Associates, 1991; Cervero, 1992; Wilson, 1993 among others). Nevertheless, propelled by the increased interest from the policy-makers, the need to capture the changes affecting today AE and to readjust or re-(de)fine its professional boundaries, a framework for understanding professionalism and professional development in AE is currently under debate (cf. Merriam & Brockett, 2007; Nussli & Lattke, 2008).

This contribution attempts to conceptualize professionalism in the field of AE, with specific reference to those who earn their living by teaching adults. In so doing we here refer to AE professionals as a socioeconomic category, hence our unit of analysis is to be found in the occupation adult educators perform rather than in the individuals working in the field of AE.

The paper is structured in three main parts. The first part critically reviews existing literature on professionalism. The account points out that traditional ways on understanding professions through static generalisations no longer apply, however the progress made in this field in the second half of the XX century still provides a fruitful ground for conceptualising professionalism in contemporary society. On this premise the following section investigates the discourse on professionalisation in the fields of AE. The analysis highlights that conceptualising AE as 'one professional' field, as it is still often the case, is of little use when discussing professionalism in today AE. Consequently the third part of the paper revisits traditional model of professionalism through the glasses of a 'role-professionalism' perspective as an attempt to re-conceptualising professionalism in AE. Special attention is here paid to those who earn their living by teaching adults. The authors' main argument is that exist several occupations in the field of AE. Some of these occupations are semi-professions, with few having reached a full-fledged professional status and others progressing in this direction. However, for this to be possible it may be fruitful to focus on the professionals' needs of AE practitioners performing specific roles, rather than on the type of occupation they hold. The concluding section shortly discusses how to take this exploration further.

3. Reviewing professionalism

Semantically the word 'profession', and later its derivatives, i.e. professional, professionalism, professionalisation, has been used with a narrow or broader connotation, depending on the correspondent historical contexts. In its narrow connotation a profession is bound to knowledge or skills of a particular nature that can be acquired from specifically identified sources. Based on this interpretation over a century attempts have been taken to conceptualize professionalism. Though analytical conclusions are still pending, the field has significantly evolved (Cunningham, 2008).

In the early academic work, two features emerged to depict what a profession is, such as the altruistic nature of professional work bound to serving the public good (Tawney, 1920), and the theoretical grounding of professional knowledge (Whitehead, 1933); with the latter feature giving raise to the distinction between professional and amateur behaviour. While professional behaviour results from theoretically grounded expertise, amateur behaviour reflects customary activities refined by trial and error of individuals (West, 2003).

Systematic attempts to studying professions, however, obtained special impetus from Carr-Sanders and Wilson's suggestion that "typical profession exhibits a complex of characteristics" (cited in West, 2003:14). This led to the development of so-called static models (Cervero, 1988), trait-based models (West, 2003), or attribute models (Cook, 2008). These models identify a set of traits - sometimes quite numerous - to define a profession (Cogan, 1953; Greenwood, 1966; Barber, 1963; Wilensky, 1964; Millerson, 1964). Albeit the sets of traits vary across countries and professions, these generally make reference to: A systematized body of core knowledge acquired through higher education programs; the guiding norms and ethics, i.e., codes of conduct; social recognition and certification; and finally, aspects of organization, such as community sanctions (Greenwood, 1966) or systems of rewards (Barber, 1963). Critique to these types of model began since the early 1970s in line with historical changes and manifested in a shift in the way professions and related concepts were studied. The problem with the static-, trait-based or attribute models was identified in the fact that they focused on the product rather than on the process (Roth, 1974, quoted in West, 2003).

Structural-functional models of professions came into place (Elliott, 1972), and the issue of power held by professionals as well as the process of and reasons for acquiring this power was put centre-stage. Professional occupations, their sources of power, authority and the ways in which they use them (Johnson, 1972:18) were characteristic of the new wave of viewing professions. These studies fall under what was later labelled process approach, which describes ways in which professional exercise power (Cook, 2008), with an emphasis on the circumstances by which an occupation professionalizes, the role of the state in professions formation (Cervero, 1988) and the degree of authority reached by professions within the organization (Etzioni, 1969).

One of the major characteristics of the new perspective on viewing professions was the elimination of clear boundaries between professions and occupations, given that described processes were about meeting the criteria that define a professional field as opposed to meeting pre-defined set of characteristics that define a professional occupation (cf. Cook, 2008). Hence the generating qualities of professions, i.e. knowledge base, collective orientation and autonomy, were understood as a continuum, rather than fixed, close-end categories (Goode, 1969).

Systematic attempts to studying professions were accompanied by a search of patterns and sequences by which occupational groups ascend to occupational hierarchy (McDonald, 1995) with the main questions of how and why status and privileges are acquired. As such, professionalisation theory emerged as a topic set in the context of issues of bureaucratization of politics (Collins, 1990). The classical theory of professionalisation culminated with "Professionalisation of everyone?" by Wilensky (1964), which serves as a borderline between classical professionalisation theory and the revisionist wave that came in the 1970s. According to Collins (1990), Wilensky's model, with its emphasis on professional control of its own training and administration to practice, along with research on stratification and social mobility, led to historical analyses of the process by which professional education and credentialing was established. Following this premise, Larson (1977) conceptualized professionalisation as an attempt to translate one order of scarce resources - special knowledge and skills - into another order - social and economic rewards; hence she placed certification as the central mechanism of professionalisation projects.

It is within this revisionist period that new attention was paid to emerging professions, so called person professions, i.e. teachers, nurses, social workers, that in the industrialising societies claimed higher professional status. To capture the social struggle of these occupations without any derogatory implications, Etzioni (1969) coined the term of 'semi-professions' to reassure that

"Their training is shorter, their status is less legitimated, their right to privileged communication less established, there is less of a specialised body of knowledge, and they

have less autonomy from supervision or societal control than 'the' professions" (Etzioni 1969:V, emphasis in original).

By no doubts, the socio-historical perspective has offered new insights such as that properties of professions and the processes for gaining higher status proved to be geographically and culturally contingent. Elliot's (1972), for instance, distinguishes two historical types of professions representative of various European countries: Status professions, as relatively unimportant in the organization of work and community services but occupying a niche high in systems of social stratification, and occupational professions, based on specialization of knowledge and tasks.

Siegrist (2004) suggests that national particularities of the meaning that is put into 'profession' and related concepts can ultimately be traced back to the genesis, shaping and duration of specific political and social systems. More specifically, professionalisation processes are argued to be context-bound and introduced during the process of social disciplining. This can elucidate the divide between Anglo-Saxon and Continental models observed by Collins (1990), with the former model stressing freedom of self-employed practitioners to control working conditions, and the latter model stressing elite administrators possessing offices by virtue of academic credentials. It has to be noticed, however, that both models refer to occupations that organize themselves horizontally, as communities with a certain style of life, code of ethics and self-conscious identity and boundaries to outsiders; hence, to a certain extent, they transcended nation-states specificities. The existing tensions between nation-states specificities and context-bound processes of social disciplining that go beyond geographical boundaries may be partly explained in light of the fact that

"...in the face of liberalization of the European market, the realization of European Union and of globalization... [the] national dimension become weaker" (Siegrist 2004:82).

This short review of the literature on professionalism shows how the field is fragmented and presents divergent views and approaches to understanding professions. However, in the sea of choices between attributes vs. process models, as well as methods on whether to view professions and related concepts through historical prism, or attempt generalizations, it seems reasonable to conclude by borrowing Crompton's (1987:106) words: "Professionalism is neither inevitable, universal, not of any single type". On this premise we will now turn our attention on the current debate about professionalism within the realm of AE.

4. Professionalism in today adult education

The literature on professionalism in AE is not as extensive and far more fragmented when compared to existing literature on professionalism as such, and the scholarly work on professionalism in mainstream education (cf. Cunningham, 2008; Evans 2008; Kinos, 2008; Thompson, 2009), or among school teachers (cf. Beck, 2009; Hargreaves, 2000; Humphreys, 2002; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998; Whitty, 2008). The majority of literature on professionalisation in AE is primarily concerned with descriptive and / or analytical accounts of the field in which people earn their living as adult educators, and ongoing processes of professionalisation in different countries (cf. "*European Journal of Education*", 2009). These include the analyses of existing education and training pathways for (prospective) adult educators (Milana, 2009); the assessment of specialised study programs (Kasworm & Hemmingsen, 2007); the implementation of certification systems (Jögi & Gross, 2009), among others. In short, available literature addresses professionalism mostly in terms of working conditions and regulations that affect adult educators. Hence professionalism in the field is a taking for granted often addressed, but rarely defined and / or questioned. This observed phenomenon may be partly explained by the fact that AE as an

occupational field is often connected with other sectors or occupation, i.e. mainstream education, community development, social work. Consequently, to discuss professionalism in the entire breadth of the AE field would require taking into consideration its historical and current development. Albeit this goes beyond the scope of the present contribution, we believe possible to shortly address the current debate on professional in AE.

It is difficult to apply identical categories to depict various occupational groups employed in AE in different countries and / or regions of the world. This difficulty is a direct result of aforementioned issue: Lack of clear boundaries around the professional groups that practices AE. In the United States, if the field is viewed upon within its entire breadth, it is easy to argue that those who earn their living exclusively by working in AE institution are just a minority. The institutionalisation process in the field of AE (Cunningham, 1991, cited in Merriam & Brockett, 2007:87) and the emergence of 'instrumental' AE (Deshler, 1991) contributes to visibility of those occupations that are involved in formalized, organized delivery of AE at the expense of other occupations, that become invisible. As Merriam & Brockett (2007) point out, the institutionalisation of AE has resulted in subjugating AE to the growing market orientation that characterizes today mainstream education in the US. With reference to the European context, Lattke & Nuisl (2008) highlight in a similar way how AE practices are enacted by not only full-time employees but by 'hidden' (occupational) groups as well. Ironically, the variety of agents within AE is one of the common traits, while the field of practice as such is characterised by a large degree of deregulation and diversity of structures, learning provision and actors worldwide (cf. Research voor Beleid, 2008; Caruso et al, 2008).

To avoid application of identical categories for occupational groups practicing AE, recent attempts to conceptualise professionalism in the field make reference to fields of activity or functions people perform to enable and support adult learning, rather than to occupational profiles (Nuisl & Lattke, 2008). This is a fruitful approach to the extent that, similarly to the process approach, it breaks down the boundaries between different occupations by describing the processes involved in performing an educational activity, rather than specific contexts within which this activity occur. However, such approach also contains some pitfalls. For instance, describing a selected number of activities still produces a closed categorisation that, far from being exhaustive, is geographically and culturally contingent. Moreover, conceptualisation of AE professionalism according to the fields of activity or performed functions does not free us from the impasse highlighted by a century of studies on professionalism: Certain functions are differently treated in various societal contexts.

Similarly, approaching professionalisation within AE throughout different aspects that demonstrate advanced professionalism (Cervero, 1992) would not stand the critique from the supporters of process approach to studying professions. With the point of departure in the belief that 'the intent of professionalization is to improve practice' Merriam and Brockett (2007) argue that professionalisation in the field of AE is a reality, at least in the US. To support their argument, they address: Graduate programs that ensure advanced study in the field of AE; existing literature and sources of information that enable AE practitioners to critically review their practices; and professional associations that socialize the 'new comers' as well as guarantee professional development. This analysis is certainly of value, as it also considers critical issues in connection to each of the focal aspects. First of all, it recognizes that the foci primarily reflect professional advancement in the field of formal, institutionalized adult education. Second, graduate studies, although valuable to define a field of action, risk reinforcing the division between mainstream AE and other 'invisible' sides of the field. Then, existing literature and information sources still privilege codified and / or disciplinary knowledge versus less codified and informal knowledge in ensuring the improvement of practice. Last but not least, professional associations, although important socializing agencies, risk creating elitist circles, especially in those cases where membership is low.

It can be seen that Merriam and Brockett's analysis is framed within the traditional definition of a profession with its emphases on traits: Special training at a higher level (i.e. graduate courses); specialized knowledge base (i.e. literature and information sources); and memberships of a professional community that strengthens a sense of belonging, hence a professional identity (i.e. professional associations). Besides, even within such approach, would it not be too simplistic to consider the intent of professionalisation as an improvement of practice? What should be done then about the occupations that deal with the psycho-physical well-being of a person, generally grouped under the category of alternative medicine, i.e. fitotherapy, acupuncture, magnotherapy? Most likely these occupations are also aiming at improving the practice, but though they are considered professions in the Asian context, they face difficulties in receiving the same kind of recognition in other parts of the globe, regardless of the provision of specialized courses, the existence of specialized literature, sources of information and specialized associations.

On the contrary, Bron & Jarvis (2008) distance themselves from such position by recognizing that it is not at all possible to speak of AE practitioners as representative of one profession in the traditional sense. By looking at contemporary structures of occupation that regard themselves as one profession, the authors do not treat AE as a unified occupation. Quoting Elliott's (1972) distinction between occupational professions and status professions, Bron & Jarvis suggest that adult educators should be addressed as role professionals. This makes it possible to recognize some unity within different occupational groups employed in the field of AE by reference to the function or role they enact, although they may not represent a united group when considering their specific occupation.

It has to be noticed, however, that Elliott's (1972) distinction emerged from a sociological analysis that, in the wake of structural-functional models of professions, primarily focused on the role of power held by certain occupational groups in society. Dissimilarly Bron & Jarvis's (2008) line of argument has a point of departure in language, which is interpreted as a temporary and time bound element that exposes people's thinking; hence language constitutes the core element for the identification with a particular community, i.e. social group, such as a professional community. Following this reasoning the authors conclude that:

"...without changing an identity or acquiring a new one it is impossible to become a professional in a specific profession... As far as changing identity of adult educators is concerned, our hypothesis is that nowadays adult educators belong to different groups wherein they develop their identities" (Bron & Jarvis, 2008:40).

In other words, adult educators develop multiple identities in connection to their disciplinary field of study, e.g. linguistics, sociology, psychology; their current occupation, e.g. consultant, manager, teacher; and AE as a field of (professional) practice. This conceptualization distinguishes between several occupations within a common field of practice; however it still presents some ambiguities, since it does not define professionalism in AE. We address this issue, in the following rubric, by revisiting the process approach to professionalism.

5. Exploring role-professionalism among teachers of adults

To illustrate the ambiguity that permeates the role-professionalism perspective, let us examine different occupations of people earning their living by supporting adult learning in an organizational context, i.e. a higher education institution. The institution is a supplier of master programs addressing practitioners willing to return to university in order to acquire further qualifications. The programs are designed, managed and implemented by a group of people composed, among

others by: A professor holding a Chair in adult education, who researches the field and contributes to the design and implementation of the program; A person hired for the only purpose of delivering some teaching on specific topics; A person from the administration, who accepts / rejects the applications of prospective students. By applying the perspective of role professionalism, as presented earlier, the professor, the teacher and the administrative staff, in spite of differences as for their disciplinary field of study and current occupation are concerned, share at least one among their multiple identities: They are professionals in a common field of practice. Clearly, due to the vastness of the field of AE, addressing the roles that practitioners take solves part of the problem in understanding professionalism. However, one important aspect is left unaddressed within such understanding of professionalism: The knowledge these professionals possess, the service ideal they enact and the degree of autonomy they hold are not the same.

Professional knowledge, service ideal and autonomy represent three generating qualities of a profession (Goode, 1969). Consequently, in order to address the issue of comparability among the AE practitioners involved in our example, as well to set the boundaries for identifying AE as their common field of practice, it is necessary to take in the standpoints developed within the traditional approach to professions.

Goode (1969) characterizes professional knowledge as a body of codified principles applicable to the concrete problems of living, i.e. abstract and organized knowledge that has a potential for action. It is unquestionable that AE inherited pedagogy as the core of its professional body of knowledge. Furthermore, there is a solid amount of scholarly information rooted in educational psychology that describes the ways adults think, process and approach new information, and mostly important how they are motivated to engage in the learning processes. In time, this knowledge base has been complemented by scholarly literature drawing on educational sociology, which depicts the social context in which adults live, work and learn. These result in what is known as adult learning theories that takes into consideration the personal as well as the social dimensions of learning, and consequently appropriate methods of working with adults in educational settings. At the same time AE practitioners are given out funds for research, they form networks to enhance the body of knowledge related to how adults learn and how their processes should be facilitated. Moreover, policy discourse seems to give out more power and recognition to AE, though critical examinations also points out the narrowness of an educational enterprise “that ignores the social costs of the commodification of material goods to human beings” (Cunningham, 2000:573).

The service ideal is another quality assigned by Goode to professionalism, which depicts

“the norm that the technical solutions which the professional arrives at should be based on the client’s need, not necessarily the best material interest or need of the professional himself or, for that matter, those of the society” (Goode, 1969:278).

It is indisputable that AE practitioners provide a service to individuals learners, which contribute to the making of human beings as active participants in society; for this reason AE practitioners have historically played a unique role in facilitating citizens’ participation in different spheres of life. Their function today is not diminished. On the contrary, the high degree of complexity that characterizes modern society reinforces the centrality of the service AE practitioners provide. Today management, design and delivery of AE provision, however, embed ambiguous values. On the one hand, it provides individuals with enriching stimulus that contribute to the making of their lives. On the other hand, it is a commodity for educational providers to pursue own profits and a means to control the type of knowledge acquired by adults (Jarvis, 2009). Consequently Goode’s focus on the service ideal, half a century later, is still topical, since it has important ethical implications.

Lastly, it is the commitment to the service ideal in combination with the mastery of the knowledge field that generates, according to Goode (1969), the third quality that professionalise an occupation: Professional autonomy. The higher the degree of autonomy and trust given to a profession by society at large, organizations, and clients, the more professional status an occupation has. It is undeniable, as highlighted in the prior section, that the large degree of deregulation and diversity of structures, learning provision and actors that operates in the field of AE has important implications in the degree of autonomy AE practitioners are granted.

Knowledge, service ideal and autonomy, however, are understood by Goode (1969) as always in a dependent relation that constitutes a continuum along which several positioning are possible. Hence applying Goode's interpretation to the example provided in the beginning of this section, on the one end of the professional continuum are those occupations that do not reach a professional status, i.e. the administrative staff. These occupations imply a limited body of abstract knowledge; serve exclusively corporate clients, and have limited opportunities for autonomous behavior. On the opposite side of the continuum stands fully recognized professions, i.e. the professor, which possess an extended body of abstract and codified knowledge; serve the individual as the primary client and possess a high degree of autonomy. Somewhere in between these two positions, stands what Etzioni (1969) calls semi-professionals, i.e. the teacher, who possess a certain degree of abstract knowledge, serves the individual client, though often for the final benefit of the corporate client, and have a certain degree of autonomy, but not necessary outside the class. In short, although the administrative staff, the professor and the teachers work within the same field, i.e. AE, their professional status is different.

In line with this argument, teaching adults, as an occupation field in its broader sense, still represents a semi-profession. In most cases, in fact, the entry requirements to this occupation include a certified knowledge in the subject to be taught, rarely combined with certified knowledge in pedagogy and / or teaching methods, but not necessary knowledge in adult learning theories and practices. The service ideal these practitioners possess may vary substantially, depending on the specific field of practice they will be entering, i.e. AE program corresponding to short-, medium- or long-cycle education. However, it is often the case that teachers are first and foremost serving the corporate client who pays their salary, both in public as well as in private educational institutions and companies. The degree of autonomy they possess also varies substantially, depending on their contractual obligations as well as the specific context of practice in which they perform their job.

By re-examining Goode's continuum in light of the role-professionalism perspective, however, we suggest that it is possible to study the position of AE practitioners on the professional continuum, by reference to the roles they perform. Referring back to the example provided at the beginning of this section, three roles can be identified: Course manager, course designer, and teacher. Each role performed may imply a 'higher' or 'lower' degree of 'professionalism' that do not necessarily match with the degree of professionalism recognized to the corresponding occupation. It has to be kept in mind, however, that different roles that AE practitioners perform also possess undeniable intrinsic characteristics. First, each role requires a certain knowledge base in terms of quantity and quality, i.e. abstract versus practical knowledge, production versus application of knowledge. Second, each role provides a specific type of service to both personal and corporate clients, i.e. individuals, organizations, and society at large. Third, each role implies a certain degree of autonomy in performing the role as well as the organization context in which it is performed.

Applying this point of view to those who teach adults, independently from the typology of occupation they hold, it has to be acknowledged, that some teachers perform according to higher professional standards than others. This is a result of the different degree of codified knowledge they possess, a different type of service they provide to the learners, and a different degree of autonomy they possess. Furthermore, it has to be considered that they may act according to

different ethical norms and values, often representing a combination of legal values, values of the profession, values of individual professionals and values of employing organizations (Eraut, 1994, cited in Lunt, 2008). Existing diversities in the degree of professionalism among teachers of adults is very often a result of individual rather than corporate professionalisation processes. Hence although individual professionalize, this may not be the case for their occupations! Recognizing the current status of affair in the professionalism of teacher of adults, as role professionals, have important implications for (re)thinking both pre-service and in-service education and training.

6. Conclusions

The main argument we presented in this paper is that it is not appropriate to conceptualize AE as one profession or as one professional field *tout court*. There exist several occupations in the field of AE that position themselves along a continuum. Only few have reached a full-fledged professional status, while others may progress in this direction, such as those who are already in a position of semi-professionalism. Among these we identify many teachers of adults working in different organizational contexts. In order for occupations and semi-professions to advance along the continuum in the direction of full professionalism, we argue for the need to re-conceptualize professionalism among AE practitioner. Our attempt to revisit the traditional approach to professionalism, i.e. process model, through the glasses of a role-professionalism perspective, goes in this direct. In particular, we suggest that professionalisation in the field of AE should be assessed in light of the knowledge about adult learning theories practitioners possess, the ethical epistemology that guides their behavior and the degree of trust by the adult learners, rather than in view of the specific occupation they hold. As a result we recon the need to further this investigation by recognizing the importance that a specific role assumes, on the one hand, for the performer to identify with a (professional) group and, on the other hand, for a (professional) group to reflect upon the existing relations between the knowledge it requires, the service it provides and the autonomy it allows within a specific organizational context. The acknowledgement that various roles have various degrees of application of knowledge, autonomy, and possibly different ethical norms, has important implications for professional development in general, and for pre-service and in-service education and training in particular.

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