

Educational media for adults: introduction to the topic and to the contributions of this volume

Eva Matthes, Sylvia Schütze

Angaben zur Veröffentlichung / Publication details:

Matthes, Eva, and Sylvia Schütze. 2024. "Educational media for adults: introduction to the topic and to the contributions of this volume." In *Bildungsmedien für Erwachsene*, edited by Ewa Andrzejewska, Eva Matthes, Sylvia Schütze, and Jan Van Wiele, 16–22. Bad Heilbrunn: Verlag Julius Klinkhardt. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-320218>.

Beiträge zur historischen und systematischen
Schulbuch- und Bildungsmedienforschung



Ewa Andrzejewska / Eva Matthes
Sylvia Schütze / Jan Van Wiele
(Hrsg./Eds.)

Bildungsmedien für Erwachsene

Educational Media for Adults

Andrzejewska / Matthes / Schütze / Van Wiele

Bildungsmedien für Erwachsene

Educational Media for Adults

Beiträge zur historischen und systematischen Schulbuch- und Bildungsmedienforschung

herausgegeben von

Péter Bagoly-Simó, Carsten Heinze, Kira Mahamud Angulo,
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Educational Media for Adults

Verlag Julius Klinkhardt
Bad Heilbrunn • 2024

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Dieser Titel wurde in das Programm des Verlages mittels eines Editorial Review-Verfahrens aufgenommen.
Für weitere Informationen siehe www.klinkhardt.de.

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie;
detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet abrufbar über <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

2024 Verlag Julius Klinkhardt.

Abbildung Umschlagseite 1: © lemono / istock.

Druck und Bindung: Bookstation GmbH, Anzing.

Printed in Germany 2023. Gedruckt auf chlorfrei gebleichtem alterungsbeständigem Papier.



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ISBN 978-3-7815-6126-7 digital

doi.org/10.35468/6126

ISBN 978-3-7815-2670-9 print

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Eva Matthes and Sylvia Schütze

Educational Media for Adults

Introduction to the Topic and to the Contributions of this Volume

(Translated into English by Sylvia Schütze)

Educational media are media which are intended to initiate and/or support learning by means of the didactic presentation of their content. Against this background, many people initially think of educational media as school textbooks or analogue school teaching and learning materials, and mostly now also of digital educational media, but still very often exclusively related to schools.

And of course, just as schools have a key position in the field of education – after all, they reach all or most children and young people in a society –, educational media also play a central role in schools. They stand therefore usually in the focus of research.

But just as pedagogy is not limited to schools and not only to children and young people, educational media are used in teaching/learning contexts *throughout the lifespan*. Among other things, they play an important role as materials for teaching staff at various educational institutions for adults, e.g. at universities or in adult education seminars, such as continuing professional education centers; they are used in integration and language courses for migrants. They can also be found as informal media, e.g. brochures, leaflets and posters for health education or various information materials for political or sexual education or continuously published parental information. And they can also be chosen as counselors – which may be the most frequently used variant regarding adults – in form of analogue and increasingly digital guides (e.g. apps, blogs) for all challenges in life.

The *specifics of adult learning* pose a particular challenge for the making of these educational media, in other words: the specific didactic challenges that educational media makers face here: on the one hand, if they want to address adults in general in such a way that they do not feel disempowered or ignored in their previous learning biographies or experiences and/or can find new approaches to learning; on the other hand, if they do not want to think of adulthood statically or homogeneously, but want to focus on a wide variety of adults with their specific needs, prior knowledge and learning abilities.

Adults are assumed to be mature when it comes to using educational media. Unlike children and pupils in families, nurseries and schools, they often choose the media themselves. And only they themselves, with their varying degrees of media literacy, must judge the quality of the media the range of which is rapidly growing due to digitalization.

Unlike educational media for pupils (mainly textbooks), however, there is very little research on the educational media for adults listed above, which could easily be supple-

mented. Strictly speaking, many of these educational media are black boxes. But it can be assumed that the often *conscious choice* by their adult recipients gives rise to *high expectations*, and that there is a great *openness*, to put it more critically: a willingness to be influenced among these users. This might not be unproblematic – not least in view of the heterogeneity of the providers of the respective educational media and the lack of transparency often practiced by them with regard to their ideological and scientific foundations and their intentions.

Educational media researchers should be interested both in the content, which can be in parts extremely manipulative, politically and socially one-sided – possibly skillfully concealed by didactic methods –, and in the target group-appropriate didactic and methodological design, in the use and in the effects of these educational media. In our opinion, there is still a lot of room for research, not least for relevant empirical analyses.

Interesting and diverse approaches to educational media for adults and research on them were presented at the Annual Conference of the International Society for Research on Textbooks and Educational Media e.V. at the University of Gdańsk in October 2023. This volume is the result of presentations from this conference and other submissions. It is structured as follows:

A basic introduction to the topic of adult learning is followed by subchapters on educational media for informal learning, for university teaching, and for schoolteachers, on language teaching materials for adults, and a report on the making of educational media for a specific context.

Adult Learning – an Introduction to the Topic

In his article “Learning Literacy. Why Adults Learn Differently and How Media Matter”, *Jörg Dinkelaker* deals with a specific adult ideal that is often taken as the basis for adult education and corresponding media design and that originates from the pedagogy of the Enlightenment: the ideal of the independent adult learner who – as a matter of course – makes use of media for this purpose. Based on a historical consideration of the formation of this ideal towards the end of the 18th century, the author interprets adult education as a practice of dealing with the fact that the *real* adults living in this world are measured against this ideal without ever being able to fully live up to it. Based on this interpretation, the author describes four central variants of adult education in the present and correspondingly four types of educational media for adults.

Educational Media for Informal Learning

In the first thematic block, the authors look at educational media that adults use for informal learning from a historical and current perspective – pamphlets, a series of letters, a catechism, counselors and computer games.

Kerstin te Heesen examines “Illustrated Pamphlets as Educational Media in the Early Modern Period”. She uses this didactic medium, which was very popular at the time, to display different visual and textual strategies and communication methods and emphasizes the importance of this research subject, which can be very instructive for educational media research – both in terms of recognizing typical structural features of educational media

in general and with regard to the informative value of this specific medium regarding socio-cultural conditions and knowledge in the early modern period.

In her contribution “Letter Series for Parents of Peter Pelikan e.V. – a First Insight into History, Characteristics and the Image of Parents Conveyed”, *Sabina Hüttinger* deals with the genre of parent letters. These letters, the edition of which in Germany was inspired by a comparable medium in the USA in the 1950s and which are still sent out by health and youth welfare agencies today, contain information and advice tailored to the age of the relevant child. The author introduces the medium and uses the first letters from the Munich association “Peter Pelikan” as an example to analyze how parents are addressed and what image of parenthood is conveyed.

In his article “The New ‘Dutch Catechism for Adults’ of 1966”, *Werner Wiater* discusses the question of what the core task of religious adult education in Catholic educational institutions is. In these institutions, the Church’s concern to impart dogmatically validated knowledge about matters of faith clashes with people’s want to be able to inform themselves freely about matters of faith and form their own opinions. The Dutch catechism for adults published after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) attempts to fulfil this need, but was and is received very critically by the official church, as the author shows.

The article “The Image of the Family as an Aspect of the Paradigmatic Order” by *Alisha Berchtold*, *Georg Cleppien*, *Volker Mehringer* and *Sophie Pokrzywa* also deals with a specific image of parenthood. Based on a model of specific author and reader constructions, Berchtold et al. reconstruct this image from counselors for educational professionals in child daycare centers. These books show a strong reduction of family complexity to an ideal-typical “model example” (paradigm), namely a middle-class, educated parenthood.

Timm Gerd Hellmanzik and *Dennis Mathie* raise the question of whether and to what extent computer games for adults can be considered to be educational media. Using the global strategy game *Civilization* as an example, they reflect on the potential and limits of integrating games originally conceived as entertainment media into educational settings. To this end, individual game elements, such as the offer of historical references and the conveyance of information about the connection between climate and resources, are analyzed in terms of their educational content. The authors locate the game *Civilization* at the interface between educational medium and entertainment game and provide suggestions for its use in adult education.

Educational Media for University Teaching

The second thematic block deals with different educational media for university teaching – classic textbooks as well as material teaching objects and digital offerings.

Christiana Bers analyses the use of “Objects of Collections in University Teaching”. She refers to teaching models in the strict sense as well as to objects that have been acquired specifically for university teaching and are given the function of educational media by their didactic use. The author focusses on the didactic significance of such objects from collections for research-based learning. Interviews with teaching staff, instructors and students show that the transformation of objects for educational purposes harbors great opportunities, but is not a sure-fire success.

In his article “The Theology of Religions in Belgian Apologetic Textbooks for Adults (1870–1960)”, *Jan Van Wiele* examines the interreligious paradigm in Belgian apologetic textbooks for adults, explicitly including students of Theology. In order to understand the scope of the topic in apologetic textbooks, the author first gives a brief overview of the treatment of non-Christian religions in Catholic religious textbooks in other fields of study for adults. This is followed by a qualitative-hermeneutic analysis of a big corpus of apologetic textbooks, the results of which the author discusses with regard to the treatment of other religions after the Second Vatican Council.

Dörte Balcke and *Hannes Großhauser* turn their attention to the specific format of book series for university teachers and students – specifically pedagogical series as part of Educational Science literature for university teaching. They compare four series from the second half of the 20th century with regard to their didactic design, their content focus, their reach (e.g. print run) and the authors involved. This provides insights into the teaching and learning culture of the subject at universities and colleges during the period under investigation.

Attila Nóbik also looks at textbooks for Educational Science. In his article, he analyses publications about the history of education for university teaching in Hungary since the 1990s, i.e. after the fall of communism. The author argues that although the new books have broken with the tradition of communist historiography and taken up new approaches and topics, their neglect of important didactic aspects may have contributed to the fact that the history of education has lost importance in the study of Educational Science.

The focus of *Péter Bagoly-Simó*'s analysis are textbooks for the study of Geography. Based on the subject's claim to be especially media-intensive, as it relies heavily on visual representations of various kinds (e.g. maps, drawings, photos), he analyses the typology, frequency and change of these so-called discontinuous text types, referring to textbooks for Pedogeography, Climatology, Urban Geography, Economic Geography and Geography Education. He shows specific characteristics of the mentioned sub-disciplines with regard to discontinuous text and makes suggestions both for possible didactic improvements of such textbooks and for further research.

Gracja Cimaszewska-Kuniniec looks at the use of digital technologies in university teaching in the field of Business English and asks which role university teachers still play in digital learning. To this end, she discusses both the possibilities of digital teaching and learning methods and the associated challenges. In interviews with more than 200 adult students and lecturers, she asked for their attitudes towards multimedia, for the frequency with which digital technologies are used in teaching and for the need of further training in this area. The results point to hybrid methods as the optimal teaching strategy, in which direct communication with teaching staff and lecturers still plays a central role.

Educational Media for Teachers

Educational media for teachers, which are intended to support them in preparing lessons and promote their further training, are in the focus of the third thematic block.

In her contribution “Adults as Addressees of Historical Primers for Children”, *Britta Juska-Bacher* examines primers from German-speaking Switzerland from the 16th to the 19th century, asking which parts of the primers contain information and instructions for

teachers and how these are communicated, as explicit manuals for teachers only gradually emerged in the 19th century. Detailed information on the title pages, forewords and epilogues as well as tables of contents and parts of the primer text itself come into view as “places” of double addressing of teachers and pupils, whereby the information becomes increasingly detailed and consistently leads to the production of teacher’s manuals.

Ewa Andrzejewska deals with such manuals for foreign language teachers and thus with a text genre that has rarely been the subject of research, although its importance for the professional development of teachers has been well documented. The author outlines typical features of these books, including methodological and didactic instructions and the provision of additional materials, and examines the role of the manuals in building teachers’ skills as well as the possibilities of their use in continuing professional development, for example to impart didactic innovations and subject-specific developments.

Thomas Heiland also takes a look at teacher training when he discusses the “Opportunities, Potential and Limitations” of “Asynchronous Teacher Training in E-Learning Scenarios”. To this end, he first presents a setting consisting of various self-learning courses for teacher training with their characteristic components, whose content orientation and didactic-methodological approach he discusses in a critical and constructive manner. Like Cimaszewska-Kuniniec’s research, his investigation leads to a plea for a hybrid procedure in which the participants of the asynchronous online courses are repeatedly given the opportunity for synchronous exchange with the teaching staff and with colleagues.

Language Teaching Materials for Adults

The two articles in the next thematic block deal with a specific subject matter that adults in some cases even try to learn by themselves – “foreign languages”.

In the first of the two texts, *Verena Stürmer* analyses current “Literacy Materials as Educational Media for Newly Immigrated Adults” in Germany, which she assigns to three categories with different didactic and methodological concepts – with a view to the very different prerequisites of this target group, which she clearly identifies: Media for newly immigrated learners who can read and write fluently in their first language, media for those who are less able to read and write (semiliterates), and literacy materials for learners with little or no school experience and literacy skills. Her study also offers a brief comparison with primers for children.

Danuta Stanulewicz and *Konrad Radomyski* analyze in their article user comments and ratings on three popular online platforms for independent language learning for adults – *Duolingo*, *Busuu* and *Memrise*. The approximately 25,000 randomly selected comments on the Internet are analyzed both in terms of general assessments and with reference to specific advantages and disadvantages of the respective platforms and their teaching/learning methods. The results reveal the using habits and wishes of adult language learners as well as potentials for improvement in the design of corresponding internet offerings.

Development of Educational Media for Adults: A Report on Work in Progress

The volume concludes with a report on a work in progress, resulting from a cooperation between researchers from Paderborn University – educational scientist *Christine Freitag* and technology didactics expert *Henrik Bode* – and colleagues from East Africa – *Henry Asimwe*, *Paul Bogere* and *Teddy Mangeni* – who are working together on the introduction of sustainable energy supply structures in rural East Africa. Under the question “Which Media for Whom? The Implementation of Microgrids [local grids for generating electricity from different sources] in Formal, Informal and Situational Adult Education Settings”, they introduce the educational media used in this project, e.g. online platforms for the technicians involved, on-site laboratories for training and printed materials, and discuss their (in)effectiveness against the background of often still firmly anchored hierarchical orders regarding access to knowledge and rigid gender roles in the local communities, which might require a special interpretation of the term “educational medium”, as the authors point out.

From different professional and didactic-methodological perspectives, the contributions in this volume approach the issues of what characterizes adult learning, what needs arise in the development of educational media for this user group, what motivations teaching staff and developers of educational media may have to reckon with and in which different formats they can meet the educational needs of adults.

We hope that with the variety and diversity of thematic and media-specific aspects considered in this volume, we can provide impetus for further research and development in the field of educational media for adults.

Acknowledgements

It was a particular pleasure and honor for the International Society for Research on Textbooks and Educational Media e.V. (IGSBI) to be able to hold its Annual Conference at the University of Gdańsk in 2023.

Dr Ewa Andrzejewska had already kindly invited us to the University of Gdańsk at the IGSBI Conference in Chur in 2019 – but then came the global challenge of the coronavirus with the associated restrictions. Thus, it took a few more years before we were able to follow the invitation and meet at the University of Gdańsk. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people who supported our conference in Gdańsk!

We would also like to thank the publisher Andreas Klinkhardt for many years of successful co-operation.

We are very pleased that our volume has been selected for open access publication by the Specialized Information Service for Educational Science and Educational Research and the BMBF Joint Project “Open Access Consortium Education for e-Books and Publications (edu_consor_t_oa)”.

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