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Establishing a research agenda

We hope that this Special Issue of “Pedagogika Społeczna” will become a milestone and a starting point of a wide research programme conducted at a European level. Indeed, much remains to be studied. To understand motives behind the titular women’s life choices, and to be able to apprehend the significance of their achievements, we need to employ three perspectives: micro (eventful and event-making individuals), mezzo (groupings, associations, generations), and macro (political, social, and intellectual movements of a country/nation/society). If we agree to opt for such an approach, then much is left for an adult education historian to do.

A number of new questions arises from what we learned from the lives and deeds of the discussed twelve adult education pioneers.

On the “micro” level

Knowing the titular women’s family, educational, and social backgrounds, professional situation, and ideological worldviews – can we deduce a pattern in the processes of becoming an adult education “pioneer”? Did their mothers (or the latter’s images) play a significant role?

What sort of an attitude towards knowledge did they develop? Why did they attach importance to the idea of facilitating access to knowledge and learning for adolescents and adults? Did this notion originate from their life stories?

To what extent did they perceive themselves as professionals or activists? Did they reflect on such a distinction? How did they differ from other women or men of their time?

On the “mezzo” level

Did the fact that adult education was promoted and initiated by an individual impact on the nature of adult education activity? Or perhaps it did not? Did those individuals collaborate with others or, instead, did they act alone? Is it possible to distinguish between male and female motivations, or male and female ways of acting and thinking? What sort of associations were established, by whom, and for what purposes? What did the process of creating ideas, sharing them with like-minded people and disseminating them to the general public look like?

On a “macro” level

Is it possible to make comparisons between different countries or historical periods? What personal contacts, informal meetings, semi-formal networks, and formal (through membership) organizations need to be studied? What trans-national influences can be deduced from them? How did concepts and designs circulate across European countries of the period? What sort of international fora existed at the time, and did they play a role in the exchange of ideas? Which influential publications were translated and distributed throughout the continent?

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The above list of research questions is by no means complete – a number of others could be added. Nevertheless, we believe that the mentioned ones can constitute a good point of departure. In view of the fact that this agenda is quite considerable it requires a group of historians, preferably from different countries and proficient in several languages. Researchers already active in various academic groupings or networks are particularly welcome. By publishing our research findings we could jointly create a “critical mass” of historical scholarship.

Contact us if you are willing to join us and proceed with trans-national research (see below).

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