

This is the **accepted version** of the article:

Úcar, Xavier. «Ressenya». European journal of social work, Vol 23 num 2 (2020), pp. 367-368. DOI 10.1080/13691457.2019.1637102

This version is available at <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/251179>

under the terms of the  **CC BY** COPYRIGHT license

Dominique Kern (2016) *La recherche sur la formation et l'éducation des adultes dans la deuxième moitié de la vie*. Paris: L'Harmattan
ISBN : 978-2-343-10256-6
Pages: 233

The first aspect worth highlighting about this book is the clarity and honesty of its title, which provides a very accurate reflection of its content. It is a book that does indeed compile, order and present, in a systematic way, research carried out on training and education in old age. The book takes as a basis the divergence between popular representations and scientific knowledge regarding older people retaining the ability to learn and adapt to new situations. In line with scientific results, the author argues that learning concerns and involves all human beings regardless of age.

Although the popular view of education involves an adult educating children or young people, from the beginning of the book the author positions herself within a broader vision of education. From a scientific perspective, she considers education to refer to any support, whether more or less structured, that is provided to a learner or said learner provides for herself, regardless of the various organizational or institutional contexts in which it occurs.

The text is intended as more than just a simple collection of studies conducted on the subject. It seeks to establish, characterize and delimit a disciplinary field of action and educational research with an identity of its own. In order to do this, it establishes – in its own words – a hypothesis: that of “*adults in the second half of their lives*”, as a target that constitutes a specific object of research and educational action. Throughout the text, the author attempts to verify whether this hypothesis holds. To this end, there is a brief analysis of the history and conceptualization of educational sciences in relation to the subject matter and also a systematized approach to global research conducted in this field in recent decades. It is also worth noting the author's claim that the book focuses on theoretical reflection and seeks the systematic exploration of a phenomenon in order to understand it.

It seems to me an interesting and risky book in this respect, as it displays a creative vocation in the theoretical field. Ultimately, its aim is to project, or construct and delimit, a new discipline for action and research in the field of the educational sciences. A further noteworthy aspect of this text is the quantity and quality of research data it contributes in relation to the subject matter from different parts of the world. Each point, presented systematically, is illustrated with a long catalogue of authors and research.

The text is constructed in a didactic style to allow the reader to retain the fundamental data in each chapter, and with this in mind chapters are divided into three parts. The first explains the subject matter to be addressed. The second, which is obviously the longest, develops the subject. And the third presents the main ideas by way of a summary to help retain the content. However, in my view this approach to the didactic structure of the text, typical of a classic academic manual, does not fit well with the

content. Despite initially seeming to be appropriate, it ends up hindering a sequential reading of the book, which feels excessively repetitive.

The book is divided into three blocks that range from more general reflections to more specific aspects of the subject matter. The first block addresses “*older*” adults and education, analysing the historical relationship between the two concepts and pointing out that older adults were already considered a target subject of education in times of Antiquity. It emphasizes the role of Comenius (17th century), who was the first to propose a model of education for all ages, *from cradle to grave*. The author also expands on her belief that the tendency of people to learn throughout their life span is an anthropological constant. Finally, she analyses the relationships between Pedagogy, Andragogy and Gerontology and connects them with the development of the educational sciences in France and the difficulties of integrating older adults as the object of educational actions and investigation.

The second block begins with a comparative analysis between research conducted in this field in English, German and French-speaking contexts. The conclusion is that, although the questions have been the same, what has distinguished each linguistic context has been the way to address them. It is in this block that, after analysing the classic division of the lifeline into three parts - childhood-adulthood-old age - the hypothesis is posited for the category “second half of life”. The author has devised this category on the basis of contributions from various authors and considers it subjective because it is something “*perceived by the subjects themselves*”.

From the author’s point of view, it is precisely the awareness of being at this point of life that changes people’s perspective with regard to education. The block ends by delimiting, on the basis of findings from different international studies, four theoretical fields that specifically characterize this target: (1) heterogeneity, which obeys the variables that comprise the category, such as health or level of literacy; (2) time, which refers to the different points at which one is considered to be in the second half of life; (3) personal experiences, which may block or stimulate certain learning; and, finally, (4) the perception of self, both one’s own and others’.

In the final block, the author presents the main elements that, from her point of view, will allow researchers to study the field of adult education in the second half of life in greater depth. Her intention is not so much to present a fixed research programme as to propose a number of theoretical tools and pragmatic guidelines to help situate this disciplinary and research field within the educational sciences. Both tools and guidelines derive from an exhaustive survey on the evolution of international theoretical and research models developed in the education of older adults.

The author ends by proposing structuring research in this field around four elements of problematization. The first refers to defining indicators that will allow identification and characterization of the target in the “second half of life”. The second addresses specific explicit and implicit learning needs expressed by this target. The third focuses on characterizing the different learning situations in both contextual and didactic terms. And finally, the fourth characterizes, although imprecisely as the author points

out, the term “non-target”, which refers to all those people who fall within the category “second half of life” but do not participate in education.

The book concludes with a small text by way of conclusion, which summarizes the possibilities of this field as a specialization within adult education.

Xavier Úcar
Full professor of Social Pedagogy
Dpt. Pedagogía Sistemática y Social
Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona
SPAIN