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Research Report

Professionalising Adult Educators in Singapore: what practitioners make of it

Centre for
Evaluation and
Innovation Research

November 2012

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The Institute for Adult Learning (IAL) aims to contribute to the competitiveness of Singapore by developing an effective, innovative and responsive Continuing Education and Training (CET) sector that is able to meet the needs of industries and the workforce. It achieves this by raising capabilities, catalysing innovation, and leading research in workforce learning.

Centre for Evaluation and Innovation Research, IAL

The Centre for Evaluation and Innovation Research (CEIR) is engaged in a set of interlocking activities that contribute to a robust, up-to-date evidence base to inform decision-making and resource allocation in the CET sector. This Centre, in particular, is concerned with programme monitoring and evaluation, strategic and futures planning, best practice in adult education and training, and policy implementation. Additional evidence is generated through systematic review of research, research on evaluation models, and collaborative cross-Centre work.

Contents

Introduction

Over the last ten years, the adult education field in Singapore has shifted from being a largely private sphere, to one which encompasses a nationally regulated system of workforce development. Alongside this development was an agenda to professionalise adult educators to raise the quality of provision. There are many elements that affect the relationship between professionalisation and quality provision. The purpose of this research is to focus on adult educators' career trajectories and professional identities in this dynamic landscape. Little is known about these aspects, which seemingly have direct implications for the engagement in the professionalisation agenda and the quality of training. A greater understanding of career trajectories and professional identity will shed light on how adult educators are engaging in their work, the support they currently seek or need, as well as their future intentions. This can then inform the professionalisation agenda to find more responsive directions to improve professional development for adult educators (Milana, 2010). In particular, this research is concerned with the following questions:

- How do adult educators conceptualise their professional identities?
- How are adult educators constructing their career trajectories?
- How do adult educators perceive the government led professionalisation of their occupational field?

After defining the key concepts of this research, this report will begin by providing a brief **background** on the government-led professionalisation and 'workforce development' of Singapore's Continuing Education & Training (CET) practitioners. It will then look at existing **literature** on the professionalisation of adult educators, their career paths and their professional identities. The **study design** will be presented before the **findings** of the data, which address the research questions. These findings will then be discussed in relation to their key i**mplications and recommendations** for Singapore's professionalisation of its CET practitioners.

Definitions

Adult educator

The term adult educator is used in numerous ways in different contexts. This study adopts the definition of an adult educator as someone who is directly associated with teaching, learning and assessment functions of adults. Such adult educators are a part of a larger CET workforce which also includes managers of education or training, human resource development practitioners, plan developers, administrative support, and marketing practitioners.

This working definition of an adult educator does not directly answer the question of "who adult educators are", but provides an outline of the types of people this study is about. The individuals in this study, however, do not necessarily perform all three of the adult educator roles, but, at a minimum, conduct training for adults. It is important to note that the term adult educator is not commonly used by actual practitioners in Singapore, where numerous other terms are more common, but also less encompassing.

Career trajectories

A lay definition of a career could be seen as biographical productions of individuals achieving according to personal preferences and peculiar destinies (Heise, 1990). In this study we approach the idea of career as an *empty* concept that refers to a period of time when people are engaged in work. It does not automatically imply upward progression within occupational fields and may encompass patterns of work that do not mirror a linear and upward form of progression that stop at retirement.

Investigating trajectories compels us to pay attention to how mobility is shaped by experiences of the past, rhythms and happenings of the present and aspirations for the future. Following Ball & Goodson (1985), it is important to distinguish that career trajectories comprise of both the objective and social element that is influenced by economic and political conditions as well as the subjective element, as seen and influenced by the individual. This distinction highlights the tension between the influence of structural factors on career trajectories and the potential for individual agency in the shaping career paths (Stevenson, 2006).

Professional identity and professionalisation

In this paper, we acknowledge that professional identity is not fixed, nor infinitely malleable, but is continually negotiated between the individual and other discursive

boundaries (Boreham & Gray, 2006). It encompasses an individual's sense of "calling" to the field, in which a subjective change occurs through a self-conceptualisation associated with a work role, giving tasks meaning and purpose (Brott & Kajs, 2001). One's professional identity may be captured as the main way that someone describes themselves. Beyond this naming role, a professional identity can be a theme of an individual's narrative in which personal, professional and systemic conflicts are played out. More recent research has moved away from this passive notion of identity to include one that refers to people actively developing their identities by being able to interact with the complexities of their environments and having a greater ability to reflect on feedback and build greater self-awareness (Hall, 2002).

Professionalisation, similarly, is not a static process. As defined by Shah (in Egetenmeyer & Nuissl, 2010):

> ...as occupations professionalise they undergo a sequence of structural changes involving the establishment of training institutions, formation of professional organisations and mastery of theoretical knowledge and skills involved in professional practice.

For this study, professionalisation largely refers to government-led initiatives, which includes the use of regulation through legislative minimum qualifications as well as professional development (in the form of formal courses that lead to professional qualifications and professional networks). It should be noted that there are forms of professional development that are not government-directed (e.g. informal professional development or existing courses from private providers).

Background: Singapore's Workforce Development

For the past three decades various national committees, including the Economic Committee (1980s), the Committee on Singapore's Competitiveness (1990s), and the Economic Review Committee (2000s), have put forth the notion of upgrading workers' skills as key for economic progress (Hussain, 2010). In 2003, a national body to oversee workforce training – the Workforce Development Agency – was set up, and from 2005 the Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) frameworks were developed and implemented. Over the past five years, in particular, Singapore has made a substantial and sustained investment in continuing education and training (CET).

The 2008 CET Masterplan stresses the importance of adult education and training in up-skilling the Singapore workforce as the foundation for economic resilience and growth in the 21st century. Closely associated with this endeavour is the perceived need to attract, develop and professionalise CET practitioners. Madam Halimah

Yacob (then-Deputy Secretary General of the National Trades Union Congress) expressed:

> *... it is ultimately your [adult educators'] professionalism and continued capability development which will ensure that our workers have the best CET opportunities to upgrade their skills and raise their employability and competitiveness" (Yacob, 2009).*

The establishment of the Institute for Adult Learning was one component of realising the vision of high quality workforce development. Its establishment helped achieve the government's aim to ramp up Singapore's annual training capacity to 80,000 by 2010 (Ministry of Manpower, 2011). Today, there remains generous government subsidies for WSQ training, as well as privately-provided training that is not covered under a WSQ framework, in an effort to continue to attract a greater proportion of the workforce to upgrade their skills. In 2012, another $2.5 billion was invested in CET (to be spread out over the next five years) to support the vision of providing high-quality training for workforce development (Ministry of Manpower, 2011).

Workforce development for adult educators

From the initial stages of government-led workforce development, it was acknowledged that the success of this effort partly lay in the hands of those who would deliver the training to other workers. In the early to mid-2000s, the existing pool of trainers who operated in a privatised and free market was very disparate, with many holding no training qualifications and unclear potential for job progression (Willmott & Karmel, 2011).

Although there were existing train-the-trainer programmes, including two delivered by the Institute of Technical Education (a workplace trainer course and the Pedagogical Certificate in Technical Education), and a Diploma in Training and Development delivered by the Singapore Training and Development Association (STADA), it was seen as necessary to establish new training requirements and standards for the new CET system. With this, WDA looked, initially, to the Australian Certificate IV (TAA) in Workplace Assessment and Training, and to the United Kingdom's Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), and in 2005 Singapore's Advanced Certificate in Training and Assessment (ACTA) was launched. The certification is designed for adult educators who perform the role of WSQ trainer and assessor with training providers or on an independent basis; anyone who wishes to perform effectively as a trainer or assessor; or anyone who wishes to conduct competency-based training and assessment (Workforce Development Agency, 2012). This has become the benchmark professional WSQ trainer qualification in Singapore, and will be mandatory for all WSQ trainers and assessors by 2014.

The enhancement of the quality of CET professionals remains vital and was reiterated by former Minister for Manpower Mr Gan Kim Yong in 2011:

> *Today, we have about 4,000 WSQ trainers, assessors and curriculum developers. Less than half of them possess a formal qualification in competency-based training and assessment. Many are freelancers whom training providers engage on a project basis. In order to grow, support and professionalise the CET community, we must now take the next step (Ministry of Manpower, 2011).*

This quote sheds light on the diversity of CET practitioners and the perceived importance of qualifications for the professionalisation of adult educators in Singapore. With the development of IAL, professionalising avenues (beyond ACTA) were set up via the provision of the Workplace Trainers Programme[1] (WTP) and the Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education[2] (DACE). Higher programmes of study, such as the Master of Arts in Lifelong Learning (MALLL) and the Master of Training and Development (MTD), have also been incorporated by the IAL in collaboration with external institutions. Such avenues for knowledge production and practitioner training are crucial aspects of the professionalisation process, as accredited knowledge and systemised training helps qualified adult educators gain skills and recognition (Tobias, 1996, p. 95). It should be noted, however, that the roles and audiences of these courses differ and it is not a straightforward case of progressing from one to the other[3]. The Institute for Adult Learning also launched the Adult Education Network (AEN) in 2009 to help build a community of practice for individuals working in the CET field (Institute for Adult Learning Singapore, 2011).

Although there are numerous government-led professionalisation initiatives, many of which were developed through collaboration with various stakeholders, it appears that little but anecdotes are known about the career paths of CET practitioners and their orientations to these professionalisation initiatives. One of this study's aim is thus to explore how adult educators perceive the government led professionalisation of their occupational field.

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[1] The WTP is designed for workplace supervisors, line-leaders and managers who sometimes perform the role of a trainer as a part of their professional duties (Workforce Development Agency, 2012).

[2] DACE is suggested for new and practicing Curriculum Developers who need to design courseware with the Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications system (Workforce Development Agency, 2012).

[3] For example, the WTP, ACTA, and DACE are WSQ courses and therefore come with no minimum pre-requisites. The MALLL and MTD, on the other hand are higher education programmes which require a bachelor degree in order to gain entry. This means that even though an individual may have completed DACE, they may not be able to join the Master's programmes unless they have a university degree.

Literature

This section looks at how existing literature has discussed professionalisation of adult educators, their career paths and their professional identities in other countries. To begin, we look at career trajectories and entry points; as focus areas, they both have seemingly direct implications not only on one's professional identity but also on an individual's engagement in the professionalisation agenda and the quality of training. A greater understanding of entry points and career trajectories will shed light on how adult educators get into this line of work, set themselves up for their future endeavours in the field, as well as how they negotiate the field over time.

Career trajectories

The nature of the adult educators' job is presented in much of the literature as one of wide variety, with more horizontal expansion than vertical. This suggests a conflict with a traditional understanding of the term "career". Traditionally, a career refers to positions and rising through the ranks in a hierarchical order, with material and symbolic benefits such as higher salary, greater influence, and higher social status. Practicing as an adult educator, however, does not seem to have much hierarchical room to move. Like teaching, it has a relatively flat career structure, where climbing the ranks usually means fewer training hours and more administrative work (Bayer, Brinkkjær, & Plauborg, 2009).

From the literature, three main elements related to adult educator career trajectories were identified: (i) moving "up" into managerial positions; (ii) growing and diversifying; (iii) and casualisation. Career progression can mean moving away from the practice of training and moving towards more administrative or managerial tasks. Distinctions have been found between adult educators who see training responsibilities as a part of a transitional phase in a managerial career, compared to those who consider themselves training "professionals" with an identity in training rather than management or industry (Evans, Dovaston, & Holland, 1990).

In Australia, there seems to be a difference between public and private providers, with management positions in public institutions being filled by advancing trainers/teachers, whereas private providers prefer to combine entry-level jobs with either managerial or general staff roles (Simons et al., 2009). Whether moving into a managerial position is considered desirable or not is further commented on by Black's (2005) study where almost all head teachers in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes said "no" when asked if they would like to become a TAFE manager. This suggests that a head teacher's career effectively ends when they move into a managerial role, even though this seems like a logical promotion and next career step.

"Growing" or diversifying is also discussed in the adult education career literature and has been identified as "real" progression compared to moving from casualised to full-time work within adult education (Kelchtermans, 2009; Simons et al., 2009). Diversifying is about being prepared for a wider range of roles, which can make an adult educator more valuable to their organisation, providing a more satisfying and permanent work life. This is a strategy used to cope with high levels of mobility and changeable work roles in the field, that may also entail rewarding aspects of deepening both vocational (or domain) and teaching skills (Simons et al., 2009).

The casualisation[4] of adult education is evident in many countries in Europe, in Australia and Singapore. The growing support for flexible and casualised employment are reflected in the traditional patterns of entering further education in the United Kingdom, for example, where practitioners start off casual, then go part-time, before moving into a full-time position (Gleeson, Davies, & Wheeler, 2005). This is similar to Australia and Germany where more vocational education and training (VET) practitioners are starting out with casual positions compared to positions on the general staff (Nuissl & Pehl, 2000; Simons et al., 2009).

Entry points

Understanding the mode and patterns of entry into the adult education profession is instructive for the study of career trajectories. Farinelli (2010) argues that there are two entry points for adult educators:(i) becoming an adult educator as a "first choice"; or (ii) becoming an adult educator "afterwards" either because one has experience as a teacher in schools or because one has professional expertise in a specific job sector. She qualifies this, however, by also stating that her research found that becoming an adult educator is never an intentional choice made at the outset of a career. It more commonly represents an opportunity to shift to a different line of work when desired progression in a certain profession is no longer attainable. In Buiskool et al.'s 2010 study, they also found that European adult learning professionals generally have 10 to 15 years experience elsewhere before they decide to become an adult educator. This is perhaps a result of the nature of the occupation (domain expertise required), in tandem with the lack of mainstream education offering courses that provide specialised knowledge in the field of adult education, which can also attract young people and orientate them towards adult education (Farinelli, 2010). This diversity makes the market less transparent, as a "novice" adult educator may come with varying levels of experience that are difficult to gauge or capture (Buiskool et al., 2010).

Although the literature suggests a large majority of adult educators enter the field mid-career, there are different ways of doing so. Many enter without specific training

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[4]A simple definition of casual workers is individuals who are hired to work on an as-and-when-required basis and are paid by the hour.

to become an adult educator, instead depending solely on their life and work experience in a different field (ibid). In the United Kingdom, the majority of Further Education teachers come into the occupation after becoming established and experienced in a different field (such as surveyors, designers, child care workers, hairdressers, etc). It is this experience that gives them the credibility they need to pass their knowledge to others, and has been historically prioritised over knowledge, roles, and identities as teachers or trainers (Venables, 1967; Tipton, 1973; Robson, 1998). Those with experience but without formal qualifications often find their entry points via employers giving them a chance to train within their existing organisation, or private training providers viewing their experience as the crucial qualifying attribute (ESREA, 2011). Nuissl & Pehl (2000) found that most full-time staff move "sideways" into adult education in Germany and Simons et al. (2009) found that, in Australia, many beginning VET teachers also had working lives outside the sector, which was often considered to be their primary employment (50% of participants). Others, who are novices, choose to pursue an adult education qualification to facilitate their career shift (Clayton et al., 2010).

Professional identity of adult educators

Various titles are commonly used to describe adult educators. They include trainer, teacher, lecturer, educational manager, coach, craftsmen/women, coordinator, or facilitator and may also include jobs to do with assessment and curriculum design (Guimarães, Sancho, & Oliveira, 2006; Jütte, Nicoll, & Olsen, 2011). All over the world, adult educators work in diverse terrains made up of disparate practices. Adult educators come from a wide array of educational backgrounds and work experiences, with many facing tensions between their aspirations, domain or industry knowledge, pedagogic knowledge and enthusiasm (Chan, 2004; Jütte et al., 2011). In terms of demographics, however, a large European study found that diversity was not as marked, with a relatively equal gender ratio (52% women) and most adult educators being in the middle of their working lives (63% between 30-50 years old) (European Commission, 2008).Two separate European studies also found that adult educators are well-educated, with most having undergraduate degrees (ESREA, 2011; Farinelli, 2010).

Existing research on adult educators frequently cites the lack of a cohesive adult educator identity due to the diversity of roles and learning experiences, with the idea of multiple identities (relationship between concept of career and identity) emerging depending on the nature of workplaces or job roles (Farinelli, 2010; Guimarães et al., 2006; Bron & Jarvis, 2008 in Milana & Lund, 2009; Nuissl & Pehl, 2000). This lack of a coherent, singular, identity has repercussions for the recognition of adult educators as professionals with clear career paths of progression, as it is difficult to find reference frames that can neatly capture their occupational skills. Unlike professions that conjure up a clear image (doctor, lawyer, architect, nurse, teacher,

social worker), there is a great mystery about what being an adult educator may look like. There is no uniform, no standard work place (like a classroom or clinic), no specific industry or type of student (there could be adults who are skilled or unskilled, voluntary or mandatory attendance, etc), and no standard point of entry. Adult educators also work in a wide variety of industries and work environments, which limit the space for strong, shared and common experiences, structures, or organisations that bond these individuals to a "profession" (Farinelli, 2010; Guimarães, Sancho, & Oliveira, 2006; Robson, Bailey, & Larkin, 2004). In Singapore this may be a particular concern, as there are no large national colleges for adult education such as Australia's TAFE institutions, and the United Kingdom's post-16 colleges.

In the above-mentioned professions (doctor, lawyer, architect) and semi-professions (nurse, teacher, social worker), people entering these jobs share a similar space for pre-training that they must graduate from in order to practice. In this pre-training, not only are they taught the competences of the formal curriculum, but they also experience a *hidden curriculum*. This hidden curriculum includes daily interactions that reflect socio-organisational structures and help construct a professional identity (Serra, 2008, p. 71). With the professionalisation of adult educators through qualifications that are becoming mandatory, adult educators may be able to develop their own hidden curriculum. Currently, however, no research can be found on the impact of formal qualifications as an entry point that may instil professional identity for adult educators.

Jütte et al. (2011) strongly assert that adult education is not a profession in a clear way. They argue there is no monopoly on the occupation or type of work, no specific professional organisation, there are big differences between institutions, orientations, educational aims and teaching models, and it is difficult to specify a responsibility in relation to customers, all of which typically make a "classical" profession. This may be a consequence of numerous issues, such as the market-driven nature of adult education, the low status of adult educators, or perhaps even the nature of adults as students, but it also raises the question of whether being a "professional" can only look one way. One may argue that lawyers today, for example, also do not work in a way that exactly meets the criteria of a "classical" profession.

Many adult educators have moved from an occupational area into educating adults about the competences required to become a professional in that area, and retain strong ties to their first occupation (Robson et al., 2004, p. 187). This means that, unlike primary or secondary teachers, adult educators do not necessarily identify themselves most prominently with the pedagogic aspect of their job that all adult educators (ideally) have in common. Guimarães et al. (2006) argue that the multiple identities that exist seem to be the cause and result of a lack of social acknowledgement of adult educators. Such an undervalued state also minimises the likelihood of long-term career goals within adult education (Swain & Cara, 2010).

Chappell (1998), situated in a different context (Australia) to Jütte et al. (2011) (Europe) may not agree with the above idea. In an environment where there are nationally regulated institutions, Chappell found that Technical and Further Education "teachers" configure their identities around the professional practice of being a teacher who belongs to a particular professional community, sharing particular characteristics. It should be kept in mind, however, that this research was primarily concerned with the identity of adult education teachers in the public sector, and does not include those in the private sphere. While this may suggest that different contexts provide varying levels of opportunity for professional identity and career progression, it does not refute the fact that in all countries the education of adults is significantly different to the education of children, and there exists a much wider variety of providers, work environments, and practitioners, which are not trained or regulated to the same degree as primary or secondary teachers. Therefore the ambiguity surrounding this occupation remains generally apparent in varying contexts.

The diversity frequently illustrated highlights that people from different backgrounds work in this field with varying degrees of commitment and also with different job roles and quantity of work (e.g. retired industry experts, casual practitioners, full time adult educators, on-the-job trainers, failed industry professionals, volunteers, temporary trainers, in-house trainers, external trainers, freelancers etc (Jütte et al., 2011; Tang, 2009). Boreham & Gray (2006) suggest that the interaction between the rise of flexible work practices and the changing nature of professional identities is a crucial issue in the education field. This is so as more people seem to be oscillating, to varying degrees, between industrial sectors and training.

Professionalisation of adult educators

After discussing some of the issues surrounding the complexities of an adult educator's professional identity and career trajectories, we now turn to see what the literature says about professionalising this occupation. In the strong sense of the term, professionalisation depends on developing a more or less standardised, research-based body of knowledge and skills, the development of extensive and intensive programmes of initial pre-service education and training to lead toward professional credentials. In the weaker sense of the term, professionalisation depends on the development of a common sense of identity among people engaged in similar kinds of activity who share a common sense of purpose (Tobias, 1996). Jütte et al. (2011) point out that there are the traditional professions such as medical doctors, architects, lawyers that easily proscribe to the above markers, and then there are what some people call "semi-professions". These do not have the requisite markers of a profession such as a professional organisation and entry via an academic qualification.

In the case of Singapore, we can say that adult educators have the opportunity to be professionalised in the strong sense of the term through training courses such as ACTA, and in the weaker sense through initiatives like the Adult Educator Network (AEN). Yet, unlike doctors and lawyers, who need to pass exams in order to practice, it is not mandatory for *all* adult educators to be ACTA-certified[5] in order to teach or train, nor is it apparent that they share a common sense of purpose due to the diversity of environments and competencies that they work in and with. Although adult educators are education workers, they are not the same as primary or secondary school teachers (who have now gained a professional, or semi-professional, status), and it is unreasonable to expect their professionalisation to mimic that of teachers. The main differences between adult educators and teachers is the 'hampering diversity', highly competitive, and largely privatised market, that adult educators need to operate within, which create a markedly different landscape as compared to school teachers. Therefore, there looms a question on whether the occupation of being an adult educator could ever be successfully professionalised or even semi professionalised, in either the hard or weaker sense of the word (Jütte et al., 2011, p.16).

The professionalisation agenda around the world

Professionalisation can occur from two directions: "top down" and/or "bottom up". The current state of professionalising adult educators is largely one of a government-heavy, top-down approach, using tools of regulation to lift the status of this occupation. There are many challenges that stand in the way of this endeavour, which largely result from the traditionally diverse background of people who may be considered as working in the adult education profession.

The professionalisation agenda of many developed countries is in reaction to changes in the labour market and uncertain, competitive global knowledge economies that are instigating a call for more highly-skilled "knowledge workers" (OECD, 2001). In relation to this shift, education for the workforce is gaining greater importance, causing governments to desire an increase in the status of being an adult educator to attract and retain appropriately skilled trainers (Hargreaves, 2000; Milana, 2010). Prior to the emergence of knowledge based economies, adult education and adult educators were given marginal political consideration (Youngman & Singh, 2003, p.6).

The professionalisation of adult educators has gained particular attention in Europe, where studies have been commissioned to investigate the current conditions of "adult learning professionals" and key-competences for "adult learning professionals". There

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[5]By 2014 it will be mandatory that all WSQ trainers have ACTA, but non-WSQ trainers cannot be regulated in the same way.

have also been wider efforts by researchers and practitioners to identify, describe, and comprehend the new demands on adult educators in diverse societal contexts, on planning training modules for the professional upgrading of adult educators and more recently, on investigating ways in which prospective adult educators acquire professional competences and qualifications before entering the profession (Milana, 2010, p. 7). While much literature on adult educators describes these workers as professionals, this is not something that should be taken for granted. In many countries there is a concerted effort to professionalise adult educators, and thus, much of the literature that aligns itself with this agenda uses terms like "adult education professionals" in order to help build upon this identity. Yet as Buiskool et al. (2010) point out, before adult educators can be "professionalised", we need to first be clear about who they are and how they traverse the adult educator occupation. Knowing this provides a context in which professionalisation activities need to be carried out.

Adult educators in Latin America and the Caribbean have been found to have low self-esteem due to their low salaries, job insecurity, limited training opportunities and lack of professionalism. Campos and Carlson (in Youngman & Singh, 2003) therefore argue that professionalising adult education will also have the benefit of improving the personal, and well as professional well being of AEs. Tobias (1996) argues that the professionalisation of a field or activity, however, is not innocent. It may serve to raise and maintain a sense of vocation, to raise and preserve the ethical standards and levels of competence of practitioners, and to provide mechanisms to protect the public from misuse or abuse by members of the profession. But, it may also have an exclusionary agenda to make practitioners of a certain occupation distinct and elitist. This has been the crux of the debate surrounding professionalisation in the United States. There, the concern is that professionalisation is not only elitist but exclusionary and likely to separate adult education from communities and social movements.

Andersson & Köpsén (2009), however raise an interesting point when they ask whether being an adult educator could be labelled as a specific profession, or whether it should be a profile or specialisation within a more general teacher profession. In Sweden, being an adult educator is not a profession, as there is no formal licensing or registration, or ethical guidelines with a system for sanctions if these guidelines are broken. There also has to be a degree of professional autonomy, which in many workplaces and countries adult educators do not have as they must strictly follow a rigid curriculum. This further highlights the complexities that developing a professional adult educator identity faces, as many of the aspects that traditionally make up a "professional" title do not exist in such a straightforward manner for adult educators. Milana and Lund (2009) agree that adult educators do not easily fit into a definition of a traditional profession, but should be addressed as 'role professionals'. Citing Bron & Jarvis (2008), they suggest that adult educators develop multiple identities in connection to their disciplinary field of study, their current occupation, and adult education as a common field of practices. This brings us back to notions of

heterogeneity, multiple influences, and the weak associations of "professional" with "adult educator".

In sum, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of the adult education terrain as manifested through the differentiated career trajectories, professional identity and professionalisation attempts. The exploration of existing literature sets the stage for our discussion of the findings in the next section.

Methods

Biographical narrative approach

As this study approaches the idea of career as an 'empty' concept referring to a period of time that practitioners spend within the field of adult education, the use of biographical narratives is particularly suitable. This approach can help us understand the work lives of adult education practitioners in relation to other aspects of their lives. Kelchtermans (2009) used the biographical narrative in his research on understanding teacher development as he felt that interpretations, thoughts, and actions in the present are influenced by experiences of the past, and expectations for the future. Such narratives focus on the practitioner's subjective, retrospective, reconstruction of their "formal career", understood as a "chronological chain of positions and roles" that a practitioner is involved in during their career (Bayer et al., 2009). This approach is commonly identified as useful when seeking to understand how people have constructed their careers as individual motivations and learning processes, which lead to professional identities, can come to light (Andersson & Köpsén, 2009; Horsdal, 2002; Milana & Lund, 2009). It is important to hear how people tell their stories, and analyse their "thinking" so that we can understand and influence practitioners' actions (Kelchtermans, 2009). Biographical narratives provide access to the dynamics between practitioners' lives and experience, which can open a better understanding of the conditions for learning and professional development within and outside pedagogical settings (Guimarães et al., 2006; Maier-Gutheil & Hof, 2011). They also allow us to focus on the interactions between practitioners and the structural conditions that make up the wider socio-cultural context in which they act. These contexts may be multiple, multi-layered and interacting with specific domains of social relations and physical context; the individual meaning is related to these conditions (Andersson & Köpsén, 2009; Milana & Lund, 2009).

Participants

This study focuses on people who became adult educators within their working lives, rather than those who enter the field as the initial or "first choice" occupation. This is because "within working life" entry points form the dominant route, both in the literature and in Singapore more specifically. The reasons behind this may include the economic market in Singapore, which provided many openings in this field for people who were made redundant during the Great Financial Crisis, as well as adult educators not being seen as an attractive job title with a career of upward progression. "First choice" entrants into adult education appear to be minimal as being an adult educator is not attractive for younger people; there are a lack of formalised entry level qualifications in higher education; a lack of career structure that can provide a clearer

idea of what life as an adult educator could offer; a requirement of domain knowledge or experience; and adult learners are generally more responsive and respectful of adult educators who clearly have the relevant experience matched by their years involved in the content area of their delivery.

Accordingly, the primary research for this study involved 20 adult educators in Singapore (see Table 1 for their profiles). As the term "adult educator" is rather broad, all participants in the sample were required to be conducting training for adults as at least one aspect of their work. This could be within WSQ courses, non-WSQ courses, or both, in any industry. The majority (70%, n=14) were working within the WSQ system, of which slightly more than half (57%, n=8) trained solely in WSQ courses. The age of the participants ranged from 32 to 69, with the majority over 40 years old. The average number of years spent in adult education amongst the 20 of them was 8.6.

19 out of the 20 participants had, or were in the process of completing, their Advanced Certificate for Training and Assessment (ACTA), which will be the compulsory qualification for all WSQ trainers by 2014. Six participants also had, or were pursuing, their Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education (DACE), which will be the mandatory qualification for all WSQ curriculum developers by 2015. 25% had other training related certificates. Eight of the participants had various Master degrees, with one currently pursuing a PhD. 80% of the participants were full time adult educators, and 65% were permanent rather than freelance employees.

Table 1. Profile of interviewees (N=20)

Sex	Age-range	Free/ Perm	Sectors trained in	Industry of Expertise	Educational Qualifications	AE Specific Qualifications
M	30-40	P	PEO (Pte Edu), Telecomms, Electronics, Engineer	Engineer	Diploma of Education, Specialist Dip Engineering, Dip C.I. Design, Bachelor (Mechanical Engineering)	ACTA
F	30-40	P	Nursing	Nursing	Nursing Qualification, Business Degree	ACTA
M	50-60	F	Engineering, Electronic Manufacturing, Supply Chain	Supply Chain, Organisational Behaviour (Marketing)	Masters in Marketing	ACTA, Cambridge University Diploma in Teaching and Training
M	NIL	F	Teaching/Psychology/Training	Learning Styles	Masters in Information Science. PhD candidate	ACTA, DACE
M	40-50	P	Education	Education/Training	B (Hons) English Language/Sociology PGDE	ACTA, DACE
M	30-40	P	Organisational Development, communication solutions, Innovation	Teaching	NIE (teaching), Bachelor Psychology and English Language	ACTA, MTD (ongoing)
M	40-50	P	F&B, Hotels	HR	Bachelor Double degree HR practice and research and marketing	ACTA
M	50-60	F	Learning and Development, Employability Skills	Learning and Development	MBA	CPLP, ASTD, DACE, ACTA
M	50-60	F	Hospitality	Airline Cabin Crew	GCE 'A' Levels	ACTA, DACE
F	40-50	P	Education	TAE, HRD	Bachelor (Business Admin), Pursuing MALLL	ACTA
M	50-60	F	Service Excellence, Workplace Skills, Employability skills	Service Excellence, Insurance	Secondary four	ACTA, DACE
M	60-70	F	Therapy (massage)	Therapy	O levels	ACTA (CU1, 2, 3, 4 & 6)
M	30-40	P	Snow boarding, Wake boarding	Sports	O levels	ACTA (CU1)
M	40-50	P	Life Skills/Train-the-Trainer	Across Industries	MBA	ACTA
M	30-40	P	Animation	Digital Media	Bachelor Degree	WSQ Orientation
F	30-40	P	F&B	Baking	Adv. Diploma	ACTA
F	40-50	F	Generic Skills in private and public and Social Services	Generic Skills	Master of Arts in Human Resource Development, BA Social Sciences	Diploma in Training and Development; ACTA
M	40-50	F	Manufacturing, Training, Retail	Manufacturing, training	Bachelor of Science (Physics)	ACTA, DACE (currently pursuing)
F	40-50	P	Private, Public, Social Service	Service Excellence	MBA	EQ Certification, Action Learning Coach, ACTA
F	50-60	P	All sectors	TAE, Service Industry	Masters in Management	ACTA

Procedure

After reviewing the literature on the professionalisation of adult educators and research team discussions, an interview guide was designed to unveil the career paths that adult educators had pursued and intended to pursue in the future; the challenges they faced and the ways they dealt with these challenges; how they positioned themselves within their field of employment; and how they see the government-led professionalisation of their occupation. Adult educators were invited to participate in this study voluntarily and no incentives were offered. Interviews were conducted at a time and location convenient to the participant, and best efforts were made for the participant to feel comfortable during the interview. Semi-structured, biographical interviews were recorded electronically and then transcribed. Transcripts were then uploaded into NVIVO 9, which was used to facilitate the coding of data. After taking a first pass over the transcripts, a coding tree was developed based on emerging themes and these themes were refined during the analysis stage. The thematic coding tree was keyed into NVIVO 9 and the transcripts were coded according to these themes.

Advantages and limitations to approach

The findings of this empirical research provide a descriptive insight into how these various adult educators have worked in a field that the government is trying to professionalise. As the sample is opportunistic, non-representative of the adult education field, and limited in size, the findings of this study cannot be generalised with statistical confidence. Gaining a representative sample of adult educators is extremely challenging due to their diversity and a lack of coherent records of who is conducting training (or participating in other aspects of being an adult educator).

However, the key advantage of this method is that it encouraged participants to speak freely about their experiences and opinions regarding their work and their wider field of employment. This provides rich data to give a deep insight into the working lives of the participants. The biographical narrative also allows for the description of the idiosyncratic nature of adult educators' work lives and moves beyond the individual and his/her career story into a more general, but grounded, understanding of adult educators' careers. It is important to note, however, that the dynamic aspect of biographical narratives does not look at a story as the one true representation of one's experiences, but that the story told is an act of sense-making and may change over time (Kelchtermans, 2009).

Findings

The findings will be discussed in three sections. We begin by considering the adult educators' *past*, focusing on their entry points into adult education. This is followed by an in-depth discussion on their *present* as we examine how these adult educators navigate through their trajectories and deal tactically with the pressures and tensions that characterise the landscapes they have to traverse. The conclusion of this chapter will focus on their aspirations for the *future* and how these ambitions will impact the adult educator's current occupational decisions and motifs of mobility.

Past: entry points

The general literature on adult educator entry points identifies two main themes: a "first choice" career; and a "mid-career" or "second career" option. In our research we have moved away from these latter two terms, as they appear to be inadequate when looking at individual's stories. In other words, people may become adult educators after working in a different field or multiple fields, and this transition may be mid-, late-, or post-career, and may be a third, fourth, or fifth career shift. The main point to emphasise is that these people have experience in other occupational fields prior to becoming an adult educator.

None of the participants in this research project became involved in the adult education field as a "first choice" career. The rarity of this occurrence is also apparent in the wider literature earlier explored (cf. Farinelli, 2010; Buiskool et al., 2010).This is perhaps a result of the nature of the occupation, in tandem with the lack of mainstream education offering courses that provide specialised knowledge in the field of adult education, which can also attract young people and orient them towards adult education (Farinelli, 2010).

However, as seen through the literature, a large majority of adult educators enter the field "mid-career", instead. Many enter without specific training to become an adult educator, instead depending solely on their life and work experience in a different field (Buiskool et al., 2010). The dominance of these typologies as "second" career entry routes is evident in our research. In particular, two dominant entry point themes –"organic" and "disjuncture" – can be identified from their narratives.

"Organic" versus "disjunctured" entry points

Organic entrances, could be similar to Nuissl & Pehl's (2000) idea of "sideways" movement, referring to individuals holding an existing occupation with specific job roles, who gradually have training incorporated as a part of their work. It seems to be this initial exposure, often coupled with positive affirmation, which entices people to slowly move away from their original occupation and slide into a role with a dominant focus on adult education.

> *...when I was in MOE, Ministry of Education, besides training the teachers, which was a small proportion of my time, I did a lot of research on learning style. So basically I was more of a researcher than a trainer... I still enjoyed the educational context, working with teachers, schools, students especially. So when I left MOE, I just wanted more flexibility. I wanted to leave school per se... So I decided to branch out on my own. (James[6], freelance adult educator)*

Organic entry points were prevalent for the majority of our research participants, who mostly had jobs that allowed space within them, or next to them, for training roles. One slightly different example of training gradually becoming one's main occupation is from the story of Tom. Tom was first exposed to the idea of being a trainer through participating in a young preachers' contest. While this is not exactly training, it led him to preach at a juvenile prison to help inmates develop life skills. Running alongside this began a full-time occupation in the insurance business, which also occasionally involved training insurance agents. This training element occurred as his boss heard he could preach. Tom states that "I always had a passion in training", but training always took a secondary place to his insurance work, which morphed into him running his own insurance firm. It was three years ago when he decided to pursue his passion on a "paid basis" and relinquished his position in his insurance agency to focus on being a competency trainer within the Singapore Workforce Skills Qualification system. This story illustrates the organic move towards pursuing training, where initial exposure occurred alongside, and then within, a non-training occupation.

This contrasts with stories of disjuncture, where people were not gradually exposed to training in a previous job, but made a clean cut from doing work involving no training (or other adult educator tasks) to jobs that centred around adult education, in particular, face-to-face training. Sue started her working life as a ward nurse before coming "full swing" into training.

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[6] Pseudonyms have been used to ensure anonymity of trainers interviewed.

I am a nurse by training. I was doing ward nursing, chronic nursing. I am onco [oncology] trained; taking care of cancer patients. That was where I started. After clinic nursing I went to nursing home. I went to varied places. And then I went to Institute of Technical Education to teach nursing as well. I was a research nurse in NUHS before I came here...When I joined ITE, Institute of Technical Education, to train nurses. That time I was just trying out. After that, I thought I've been in nursing for some time. I can't call myself I'm good. But I think there are some experiences and sharings I can do with new nurses. With this idea I came to training, full-swing.

When prompted further about why she chose training Sue elaborated:

I do want to see some changes in the healthcare stuff. We're not teaching like hundreds each batch. Perhaps each batch is like 20, 25, that's the average per class. With every one of them, if I can see changes, from the time they step in, to the time they go to clinical. I can see the improvements. How they treat the people, the patients. Personally I find that that is motivating.

Sue identifies a clean shift into training, and draws on her knowledge and experience for her new role. Her new role is closely related to her previous work in terms of content, but she never played a training role as a part of her practicing nurse role.

Andy talked about his entry point of disjuncture in a more abrupt or brutal way. He refers to his shift as "a cut". Andy has shifted in his career from having an IT background, to being a business manager, and gaining the title of General Manager at the peak of his career. At this point he asked himself, "Is that what I want to do for the next 10 years?"

...that's not what I want to do and I left my job. I left my job and went in search of full-time consultancy or training prospects. I just wanted to get out of that corporate and I wanted to go into the consulting...I wanted to combine that, everything I have and get into consulting and training industry or rather I would say consulting was the initial thought...but the consulting didn't go that well because it wasn't that straightforward as I thought. You could have all the experience and all the academic background, you have a Masters. So after three months and after six months it didn't go to be honest and that could be financially draining, especially for a high income earner with all the high assets then, I decided that I need to swap, I need to come training first.

This story sheds particular light on the inadequacy of naming this entry point "mid-career" or "second career". Here we can see that Andy had already experienced various shifts in his career, and this one firstly pointed him in the direction of consulting before eventually leading to training. These two potential occupations did seem to be attractive options as they allowed him, like Andy, to draw on his wealth of experience in a different setting. Other points of disjuncture noted in the data are caused, not only by a hunger for a "sea change", but also physical limitations that meant one could no longer perform their job role and needed to find alternative work.

> *… I was in the pastry line for few years actually. About five years? Until I have a bad accident I cannot stand anymore, I mean I couldn't work... I'm a hands-on person. Until a day where there is this accident where I cannot work in the kitchen anymore I started in the teaching line... I always feel that I shouldn't hold onto my knowledge until I die. I should pass my knowledge to the next person...I say, "whatever you learn here you don't stop here, you have to generate to the next generation. If what you learn or what you created you doesn't pass it to the next person, then you stop there." I told them, "Imagine the olden days. The Chinese chef or all these, they won't teach you all these tricks, then how? Now all the things different right? (Linda, permanent adult educator in F&B sector)*

Entering the teaching or training line in a related field, but with no training experience, is again reflected in this story. The push, however, did not come from boredom or mental burnout, but was instigated by physical incident. Teaching is presented as an attractive, exciting alternative, which in this case, may not have been possible without experience in the pastry line.

These stories, and those of the other research participants, illustrate that there are multiple ways in which individuals enter the adult education field. Some are exposed to this line of work in an organic way, gradually, through exposure within an existing line of work. Others make a clear break from their previous occupation and make a somewhat brave decision to venture into the "unknown". The reasons behind why people who make a gradual transition versus a transition of disjuncture are slightly different. For the organic adult educators, it seems that confidence in their abilities encourage the transition, with people telling them they have a talent, or should share their experiences. For those whose move is more abrupt, training is a new endeavour that offers them an alternative occupation where their previous experience and knowledge can be utilised. The implications of these varying entry points will be further discussed at a later stage in this paper.

Present: navigating through pressures and tensions

Three themes emerge strongly from the analysis of the interview data in relation to how adult educators navigate through their individual career trajectories. First, and closely related to the preceding section, the *differentiation* in adult educators' profiles and motivations is highly discernable. The heterogeneity of this group is an important point of departure for examining trajectories as it offers reasons and explanations for the way AEs develop professional identities. Next, we discuss the pragmatic and perennial problems faced by adult educators, as their professional lives are set against the backdrop of structural and economical pressures and tensions. This section on their *struggles* demonstrates the difference in their efficacies to resolve issues AEs typically encounter. Finally, the analysis reveals that there is no one "ideal" or putative professional pathway the AEs can trek or have trekked. Many of them invented pathways as they went along, tactically figuring out what they had to do to manoeuvre through the pressures and tensions of this vocation. We discuss how the construction of their career trajectories is *practically accomplished and not designed*.

Differentiation

> *You have the corporate trainers. You have the high-powered. They have all the right contacts. They know all the right people, high-level people in MNCs, big companies. They run programmes that are tailored towards normally those senior management. They are raking in a lot of money, of course. They charge $5,000 per day, $3,000 per day. They bring to the table certain number of flexibilities, and know-how in dealing with people of that status. These groups of trainers are at the top. They select their jobs. They don't even come into our [the WSQ] circle. For them it's like, WSQ, forget about it. We don't hear about them. The more humble ones they do. For them it's like every job opportunity is a job opportunity. The more liberal ones, they would. But there are some who wouldn't be bothered: 'I have enough on my plate where I operate. There's no need for me to move into another circle'. Then you have what we have here, the line trainers, the WSQ trainers, the industry trainers. Obviously they don't get paid that well. Sometimes they struggle, to be honest. They don't have enough assignments. So they're scrambling here and there, trying to look for jobs, training assignments. That is another pool altogether. Then you have the different strands, you have the profiling type of trainers, you have the facilitation type of trainers, and then you have obviously the technical trainers. Again they operate in their own spheres. So many different types. (Leon, permanent adult educator)*

Furnishing a descriptive summary of the varying profiles of adult educators in Singapore, Leon, a full-time WSQ adult educator, speaks of the various strata that make up this segment of the workforce. He distinguishes clearly between WSQ and non-WSQ trainers, but also acknowledges different characters and profiles within each broad group ("profiling type of trainers", "facilitation type of trainers", "line trainers", "liberal ones", "at the top", "humble"). There appears to be overlapping layers and spheres of operation: some trainers choose to work in both corporate and WSQ settings and partake of the opportunities across the spectrum, while others offer their services exclusively to just the corporate clientele.

Daniel, a freelance trainer in the hospitality industry, similarly describes this heterogeneity, and further highlights the "disconnectedness" within the training "community":

> *Different level, different groups. When I say different groups, I meant different core areas of expertise. Some of them are curriculum designers. Very quiet. They sit down there; they have questions that are quite different from what facilitators would ask. Then there is another group of facilities/presenters. Then there are people who are very very engaged. Among all these there are some who are very engaged in knowing whether the message has gone across. Yet there are some who are very aloof, I'm here just for the money. There is a training community. But I think it's very disconnected, very proprietary. If I am with certain large training organisation, that community is there only… There's no catch-all.*

Although Daniel speaks of the adult education community at large (inclusive of curriculum designers), his description centres on expertise and how that correlates with the level of engagement or confidence a trainer possesses. As he contemplates the intentions of some trainers, he observes that those who are aloof enter the profession for its pecuniary gains. He concludes by saying that "there is a training community" but adds a disclaimer that this community is not all-encompassing.

Daniel's observation of the contrasting levels of confidence, engagement and expertise is incisive and we found such diversity even within our group of 20 interviewees. For some of the trainers interviewed, training is described as "natural" or their "calling"; for others, it has been a gradual process of amassing experiences and learning how to be a trainer. As discussed in the Methods section, the educational trajectories of these educators also range across a broad spectrum ('O' Levels to PhD). The observation on the different motivations for being in the profession (pecuniary vs non-pecuniary) is not isolated, but consonant with the views shared by several other interviewees. Some revealed that they are motivated by the yen and curiosity to learn: "The self-directed exploration, the 'eureka' moment, is what we look for in learning. So that's my driving force, that why I'm in this industry, so to speak" (Daniel), while others see themselves in the business of workforce

development, training and imparting skills and knowledge. For the latter group, their raison d'être is to "help" others get jobs or get better jobs. These trainers typically see themselves to be training for the masses, rather than specializing and training for a niche market.

The profiles of trainers are diverse, and this is unambiguous amongst trainers themselves. To be sure, it is less clear if trainers take to this differentiation sympathetically. Eleanor, a full-time adult educator, relates this differentiation to "messiness": "I realised that it is a messy journey among the adult educators, while educating in the market. It's a messy mix of people that I am going to encounter". Although it is never explicit that this differentiation is opposed, the lack of a coherent community seems to cast a sense of uncertainty about professional identity amongst the adult educators. Furthermore, the trainers are faced with trainee populations that are, too, heterogeneous; trainees come from diverse occupational and educational backgrounds and have different needs. Sue, a permanent adult educator in the nursing industry described her training organization as "rojak"[7] and Huimin, who trains in both the WSQ and non-WSQ sectors, compares training populations to the different tiers of customers of banks and their corresponding needs:

> *To me, is there a need to be homogeneous [WSQ & non-WSQ training]? Maybe not. What is the point of merging it, when the needs are so different? … (A)ll programmes are to serve the learners. And their needs are very different. So to me is, it's like you talk about banking, you have personal banking, the mass banking, you have priority banking. And priority banking, their needs are very sophisticated and very different.*

A freelance trainer in the SPA industry, Sheela shares similar sentiments about this diversity and stresses the varying motivations of learners:

> *This adult learner, you can group them into various categories. There is one group who are forced to attend. There is another group who wants to know more. There is another who wants recognition. So they form the bulk of your adult learners. So as providers…I don't know how you all go about to address this one. (Sheela, freelance trainer)*

Her comment appears to carry a hint of resignation, as if she is unsure of how the current training system is able to cater to the learners' differing needs and motivations for attending training. Leon, a full-time AE, albeit more zealous, nevertheless acknowledges he is still learning how to address diversity in learners' needs despite his half a decade of experience in adult education.

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[7] A Malay term for a food dish made with a combination of ingredients.

I'm supervising practicum learners. As much as I am supposed to be supervising the learners, for me it's a peek into different worlds. Because the learners all come from different training backgrounds. There was once when I went to Jurong Island to see the trainer operate in an oil and gas training environment, that to me was fascinating. It's so different, it's very technical training. And the group of learners that you get was of a certain type. They were all from Kazakhstan. To me that's fascinating. If I were to operate in this environment, how would I do it? I have now nine practicum learners; they're all from different industries... It's just fascinating, because I realise there are so much that I don't know.

The smorgasbord of different trainer and trainee profiles brings to light the necessity for differentiation to be acknowledged, considered, and appreciated in this vocation. The idea of a single entity, an ideal type and profile of trainer is challenged through these narratives and begs the question of whether the WSQ system, as it is, impedes or supports differentiation. Additionally, stratification along the lines of function, expertise, and motivation is seen to impact the ways adult educators conceptualise their professional identities. For example, the following extracts from our interviews illustrate the different ways they relate to the professional identities of an "adult educator", "trainer", "lecturer" or "facilitator":

It sounds a little bit limited like adult educators, for me I would prefer to be called like a mentor I think. There is no boundary of the age of people who want me to mentor them and want to be mentored. So I think adult educator is kind of limited in terms of definition (Nate, permanent adult educator in Hospitality, in his 40's)

Leon: Primarily I see myself as a designer, more than anything else. I like the process. I like the fact that if I'm wearing a curriculum developer or courseware developer hat, I'm designing for sure. Even when I'm in the training environment, doing training/teaching, I'm still designing. It never stops…
Interviewer: But you wouldn't tell people 'I'm a Designer', if they ask?
Leon: No, because it takes a lot of explanation… I just say I train. Even then I'm uncomfortable in saying, because of the connotation. Training means I stand in front of a class and then just deliver, and they just learn, and that's it. That's the usual definition that people will think of. (Leon, permanent adult educator, TAE framework, in his 40's)

Both Nate and Leon, permanent adult educators, view their professional identities differently: the former prefers to be perceived as a mentor, and the latter sees himself as a designer. The terms that are typically used within their profession, "trainer" or "adult educator", are seen to have limitations. There is also a sense amongst the interviewees that the nomenclature they are encouraged to use to introduce their work – adult learning, adult educator – is not yet popular and the awareness of what these activities entail is still low.

> I think adult learner and adult educator, these two terms, have never appeared in my vocabulary until I joined the WSQ. In fact when I joined the ACTA programme in 2009, adult educator did not even appear. Here at IAL, it was still called associate trainer or adjunct trainer. (Tom, freelance trainer, generic skills)

> Adult educator as a language is not so common in the society. So I tell them I am training trainers. That's what I am doing. Do I tell the people that I am training trainers in the WSQ market, I don't. Because half the society don't know the WSQ exist. I'll say I train the trainers. However if I'm handling people in the WSQ market, then I will introduce appropriately (Eleanor, permanent trainer, TAE framework).

The interviewees thus savvily and pragmatically use different labels to introduce their work and tailor their occupational brief depending on whom they speak to. It is also broadly agreed that different occupational terms connote different meanings to the public. One interviewee, Colin, a freelance adult educator, when asked what he calls himself – trainer or adult educator – responded:

> I think there has been a discussion for a while. Does it matter? I think perhaps for certain people, certain terms connote certain things. When I once talked to one gentleman and I said I was a trainer, he said, 'what animals do you train'? That is the thing perhaps; a trainer imparts skills... you say you are a coach and [they ask] whether you are a sports coach, so it is a case of whether I feel that in an industry, what do we see ourselves? I would not have any preferred term if you ask me. Well if need to, perhaps I would say yes, I facilitate the session, but would I like to be called a facilitator? I don't think so.

The mix bag of terms that are available for use and are used appears to eradicate any preference Colin has for how he would introduce his professional work; it appears that he does not see the need to call himself a 'facilitator', just because he 'facilitates', or to be called a 'coach', if he 'coaches'. Colin reminds us of the variety of functions that adult educators have to perform, and how this is indexical of the different

specialisations and expertise each AE possesses. Against the backdrop of government-led professionalisation, this raises serious questions about the possibility of a shared professional identity amongst adult educators who have very individualised occupational trajectories.

Perishability

The need to pay attention to specific domains of expert knowledge is also a theme that has emerged clearly. This holds particularly true for adult educators within specialised domains of practice who described having to oscillate between industry and adult education – or "float in and out" (as expressed by Colin, freelance trainer in his 50's) – if they want to remain relevant in training and education. An adult educator in the engineering field, Eugene, speaks of being unable to keep up with swift technological developments in the field. His narrative serves to represent the problem of 'perishability' of domain expertise:

> *Because technical, unless you're in the organisation, you can see the change in technology. But once you're outside, you have to keep abreast of it, because technology changes very fast. So I guess, probably I treat that as I may not want to dwell on that area. So I go more for academic. Academic is little more stable.*

Eugene tells us that he re-orientated his occupational trajectory to focus on more theoretical (or 'academic' as he called it) aspects of training. Pedagogic work in highly specialized areas of knowledge and practice is thence vulnerable to the perishability of domain expertise, and adult educators have to actively "update" themselves, or move between industry and training/teaching. Marcus, an adult educator in the creative industries speaks about the particularities of his field and the challenges of staying up-to-date while training full-time:

> *So I would say if a lecturer especially on CGI industry, if a lecturer completely shut the door on the production side, keep teaching for a few years, I think he is going to behind the line, slow down a lot and in terms of technology-wise, I would say it is not going to be beneficial for students to have the lecturer who just be like that. All these things keep updating all the time, you know IT, every single day there are going to be a new computer being launched. So you have to keep updating yourself all the time.*

During the interview, Marcus also noted that he had encountered outdated curriculum when he first began WSQ training in the creative industries. He was able to notice the redundancy because his specialist knowledge was still relatively 'fresh': "I used the template and I looked through it and I felt like okay, this part is quite out of date, this

part we can remove it you know, students no longer need this. The industry doesn't require this thing anymore".

The problem of perishability is a quandary of the adult education industry: how does a training provider retain its best specialists as trainers and educators, while ensuring that they possess and embody the most up-to-date knowledge, skills and attitudes to inspire the novices and learners? The oscillation between industry and training would also require more sophisticated and strategic manpower planning on the part of the training providers and this would further differentiate the occupational trajectories of the adult educator.

An AE's struggle

We continue to explore the factors that shape the occupational life-courses of adult educators. As we shall uncover in this section, the lack of general visibility of these forces and consequent movements is compounded by the largely privatized nature of the field of adult vocational education in Singapore, in which a high proportion of practitioners are freelancers engaged by private, often competing, training organizations (Wilmott & Karmel, 2011). Four struggles of the adult educator are highlighted: (i) job and income security; (ii) lack of mentors and adult education as a lonely venture; (iii) the need to continually amass 'reputational capital'; and (iv) heavy workload as well as doubts about government-led professionalisation. These conditions clearly create tensions with a wider aspiration to create a professional community with a shared professional identity.

I. Job and income insecurity

Anxieties about job and income were, arguably, central concerns for freelance adult educators. Although the professionalisation of adult educators in Singapore aspires to ameliorate these conditions of uncertainty, the tenor of our discussions with the trainers belies such ambitions. James, who had earlier in his life-course transited from the civil service to the private training sector, speaks of his initial struggles as a novice in the industry. It was the transition that James identified as most testing, a challenge that he did not seem prepared for:

> *I suppose that transition into the private [training]sector was a lot*
> *tougher. Because in the private sector, it's not just the training but*
> *also running the business, networking, having that ability to*
> *foresee what's happening in the world and the business sector. All*
> *those were big challenges… There was one point in time when I*
> *only had $11.00 in my bank account. That was all the money I*
> *had. Because the money from clients didn't come in at that point of*

time. I tried to go to ATM, I tried to withdraw. They didn't allow me because minimum withdrawal was $20.00. I had to go without lunch that day. (James, transited from civil service to private training sector)

For Daniel who has been in the industry for two years now, the task of securing sufficient training assignments is described as a formidable aspect of the terrain he has to navigate:

… my employment, my income, whether I get sufficient training assignments... that has been dismal really. It's very sporadic. It depends on your registration with the various training providers. This is not unique to Singapore, it happens all over the world. You're registered as self-employed. When you're available, they will call you. And noticed that once I came into this industry head-on. There are inner circle group and outer circle group. Those on the inner circle group will always get the assignment first. The first pick of the cherry, so to speak, on the schedules. And which days, you want the morning. Oh you're with IAL, you take the morning group first. I'm of course on the outer group. And beyond the peripheral. Only when the inner group cannot meet the ATO's business rosters, then it's slowly farmed out to the rest of us out in the fringe. That has been dismal in that sense. (Daniel, freelance trainer in Hospitality industry)

Daniel's narrative bears an attitude of pessimism and disappointment. In addition to describing the uncertainty of being a freelance worker, he bewails what he perceives to be an 'inner' and 'outer' circle within the training community. This perception of an elitist division compels what seems to be a feeling of resentment that tapers into a sense of dismay. Furthermore, adult educators compare their training payment rates when providing their services within and outside of the WSQ sector. Huimin, who trains in both WSQ and non-WSQ sectors, draws attention to the disparity between the types of prevailing payment rates for freelancers, "If you think about it… just thinking aloud: WSQ programme pay about $500 a day, sometimes maybe $700. Corporate pay about $5,000 a day". The 'attractiveness' of training in a WSQ training organisation, when related to extrinsic rewards, is still not recognised. Sue reveals to us the scenario for the Nursing sector:

Interviewer: Do you think training or lecturing is an attractive job?
Interviewee: Financially it's not. This part needs some improvement. But intrinsically, it is. I do believe many stay in this because they are really interested in this. They want to see changes in the learners, or in the industry. Or else usually less than a few years they will be out. This is what we have seen. Less

than two to three years they will do something else, or they go back to nursing (Sue, full-time adult educator in a WSQ Nursing ATO).

The challenge of adequate remuneration to retain talent is a manpower issue that plagues sectors of the workforce, not just adult education. What is perhaps unique in the case of adult education is that there is the option for adult educators, particularly those from specialised backgrounds, to move between the vocations of training, back to their 'home' industry, especially if the latter appears to be able to provide them with better extrinsic and/or intrinsic rewards.

II. Lonely endeavour and lack of mentors

Another struggle frequently cited by adult educators is the loneliness they face within the profession. Whilst freelance workers often point to the feeling of loneliness in the job and that they lack daily social and professional contact (Lemmergaard and Vaiman, 2007), the sentiment of working in silos is shared not only by the freelance trainers we interviewed but also adult educators who hold permanent positions in their training organizations:

> *Yes, I feel alone in my work, very much… Very often the colleagues don't cross-share what's most exciting until it's 'post' (Eleanor, permanent adult educator, TAE framework).*

> *So I didn't meet the right people who can really help me in my business growth. At the moment, more or less, I am solo… I am fighting the battle all by myself (Nate, permanent adult educator in Hospitality, in his 40's)*

At a quotidian level, the loneliness experienced by the adult educators is not only due to the lack of social and professional contact but compounded by the lack of mentors. Interviewees are of the view that mentoring is not profitable in this business as sharing "trade secrets" could result in the protégé taking away training opportunities from one's own plate. The issue of proprietary, which features strongly in discussions, largely informs this stance:

> *Adjuncts mentoring adjuncts, is probably quite tough, because they see each other as competitors actually. They are competitors, No.1. No.2, for myself, when I was out there in the business world, I had to possibly find mentors from a different field. They are not within the educational field. (James, permanent adult educator, TAE framework).*

The truth of the matter is, the reality in life is that, out of the many peers, whether you call them educators or trainers, there are many who are not very keen in linking you up. I think it is because linking you up is tantamount to saying that is getting you into the same organisation. You land up fighting for that piece of pie with me (Tom, freelance adult educator, service excellence framework)

In lieu of searching for mentors, Daniel, here, asserts the need to be self-motivated and the need for self-directed learning:

Bouncing off ideas is very crucial, I find. And I find that very lacking. I suspect that there's proprietary rights. 'It's my idea, why should I share it with you?' And we all have our biases… Do I have a mentor? No. But… I read a lot, as much as I can. That will give me insights into many different situations. Not only in training. Not in a training topic, as in you go to the library and pick up a book on training. You have to read widely to get the flavour of learning behind that passage. Suddenly it's just connects, hey, I can use this. I am my own mentor, I suppose (Daniel, freelance trainer, Hospitality sector)

The largely privatized nature of the field of adult vocational education in Singapore sets off competition between adult educators, and this can be seen across sectors – from the TAE to F&B frameworks[8]. Knowledge sharing has always been viewed as a fragile process comprising conflict of interest among the people involved (von Krogh, 1998; von Krogh et al., 1994). Several elements influencing the decision whether to share or conceal knowledge can be identified and an important factor in this respect is the role of interpersonal trust (Renzl et al., 2005). The lack of mentors within the adult education landscape appears to be in want; however, a couple of AEs expressed how they actively seek out colleagues they can *trust* to "bounce ideas off":

…I make sure that there are people around me on a close basis, that I can spar with, or bounce an idea off, get some feedback. So that's how I function (Leon, permanent adult educator)

Interviewer: Do you have an informal bunch of people that you can talk to?
Huimin: Yes, of course. You know who is who. There are these people that you trust that you will bounce off ideas from (Huimin, permanent adult educator, Service Excellence).

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[8] Marcus from the creative industries, and an exceptional case out of the 20 interviews, did however cite a supportive environment amongst colleagues.

Leon demonstrates how he has had to be proactive ("I make sure…") in seeking out colleagues he can collaborate with and Huimin highlights that trust is a necessary ingredient before knowledge sharing can begin. These examples, together, illustrate the possibility for adult educators to create the conditions to collaborate and work with others, despite structural pressures and tensions that might impede the establishment of trusting relationships. The challenge that looms for any government-led professionalisation endeavour is how to provide the necessary space and conditions for adult educators to collaborate without feeling apprehensive about proprietary issues and the appropriation of ideas.

III. Reputational capital

> …it's a very small community. And clients are very smart. These days when clients want project, it's by word-of-mouth. Sometimes we have a request, then we say, 'so how did you know of us?' They say, 'so-and-so referred'. A lot of it is by word-of-mouth. Everyone can write an outline and you can even cut-and-paste from Internet. But ultimately how this person deliver, you talk about the soul of it. These days clients go by word-of-mouth (Humin, permanent adult educator, Service Excellence).

"Word-of-mouth", "track record", "sell yourself" and "reputation" are terms frequently used by the adult educators we interviewed. Grouped together, these concepts could be viewed to culminate at the notion of "reputational capital". According to Fombrun (1996), reputational capital is "a form of intangible wealth that is closely related to what accountants call "goodwill" and marketers term "brand equity" (ibid, p. 11). More importantly, reputational capital takes time to create but can be easily damaged even after many years of endurance (Hall, 1993, p. 608).

Jenny, a permanent adult educator with a celebrated "track record" in the field, describes how she has amassed reputational capital over time:

> I always believe that if I take on a job, my customer must have a peace of mind. They must trust me. I have to build that reputation. Over the years, I have built up that reputation. I'm very very particular about my quality of work. Even my staff when they do work for me, my consultants when they do work for me, every piece of work come to me for vetting. And I edit that myself. I want to ensure quality before it goes to customer… And to me reputation is so important. And I find that governed by these values it always reminds myself that I have to do a good job… Of course people talk about me. When they talk about me, it's word-of-mouth. You're actually advertising me. I must say I'm very blessed. And because of that I really had no problem clinching orders. But now it's very competitive because of the price. But still,

although it's competitive, I believe in positioning. And I always tell people, 'fine, you can get a developer that charge very low, but really it's the quality'. For me it's you give me the order, you pay me the rate that I want, I can assure you that you can go to bed peacefully. You don't have to worry, I give you quality work. That kind of thing. So that's the kind of assurance I give to my clients (Jenny, permanent adult educator)

Upholding relationships with her clients and safeguarding her reputation take centre stage in Jenny's discourse about how she manages competition and ensures she gets training opportunities. Like Jenny, Molly, a freelance adult educator in generic skills, is confident of her position in the professional arena:

If they have hear about you, and they've got your name and they have seen you in action, generally they want to continue that relationship. In a sense, I don't really have to worry that so many people who've gone into ACTA. Competing part I'm not that concerned. Once you're established, you have that niche. You just continue to upgrade yourself; you still will have your client group (Molly, freelance, generic skills)

Molly's confidence in traversing through her occupational trajectory appears to be derived from the reputational capital she has amassed over time, particularly because she had spent many years in the corporate world before becoming an AE and had established a broad network of strong contacts. She mentioned that she is not worried about the "many people who've gone into ACTA", as if to imply that reputation outweighs certification in this field. The struggle to keep up with the reputation game is apparent for some of our interviewees, particularly the newer entrants who need to develop their pedagogic know-how while simultaneously learning how to "market" themselves to clients. These tensions can be viewed as a corollary of the competitive conditions created by the largely privatised nature of the field of adult vocational education in Singapore, a field that is also "small" – as described by Huimin in the opening excerpt of this section.

IV. Heavy workload and doubts about government-led professionalisation

Concepts such as quality control and quality assurance have been frequent topics of discussion in recent decades and can be related to a new form of public management intended to improve public efficiency through better management (Liedman, 2012). The influence of this form of management has diffused into the adult educator arena and are now intractable and penetrated expectations, resulting in higher demands for training providers to demonstrate 'quality' in their work:

… nowadays, in this industry, you don't just do training, you do many other tasks as well. You shoulder many other duties as well. I don't know whether it is a good or bad thing (Sue, permanent adult educator, Nursing)

I don't have a desktop. Now you notice? I have no time to do anything. I just run around, meetings after meetings, auditing, outside meeting, I don't have time to do work at home. So when I get back home, I do my work until 1.00am. So you see I have a lot of sacrifice to make. This kind of business, not easy really. So when I'm overseas, I also have my laptop, doing my work in the hotel… I work seven days a week. You see the sacrifices we have to make. (Jenny, permanent adult educator)

As permanent adult educators in training organisations, Sue and Jenny speak of the deluge of administrative tasks they have to manage, over and above training. Many of our interviewees mentioned the importance of ethics and an ethos of "playing fair", thus acknowledging the importance of compliance and proper governance within the training and adult education sector. However, the workload that results from the existing quality assurance regime is a great deal for the interviewees. In our interview with Sue, she added that administrative responsibilities are borne by permanent staff, yet there are adult educators who are explicit about not wanting to get involved in such matters thereby resulting in some with heavier workloads than other. The inequity in job allocation, coupled with what is perceived to be inadequate remuneration, results in manpower attrition.

New public management has also led to increasing pressures for certification within professional enclaves. With many countries tightening up the regulations of adult education for nationally organised systems, more practitioners are taking courses to get certified. It seems, however, that the courses on offer do not recognise the diversity of their participants. Clayton et al.'s (2010) study on the Certificate IV for Training and Assessment in Australia found that the course was received more favourably by real novices, and seen as superficial and less useful for those with prior training experience, skills, and information related to the course content. At the same time, more experienced participants felt that the course was not enough to equip real novices with the skills to become a trainer straightaway.

Our interviewees similarly spoke of their concerns about government-led professionalisation, particularly in the area of regulating that adult educators be certified with ACTA:

The joke in the training community is if you are an experienced trainer, you don't want to go round and tell people that you're ACTA-certified. We heard clients telling us, sometimes with the relationship that we have with the client in the private sector, that

this provider is trying to sell his trainer. He keeps telling me this trainer is ACTA-certified. And he told the trainer that ACTA is very basic. And we do see a lot of people wanting to do career switch. But a lot of them [with ACTA] are still without projects (Huimin, permanent adult educator, Service Excellence).

Huimin's candid expression of the disjuncture between credentials and securing training jobs is akin to the findings from Clayton et al.'s (2010) study where experienced participants felt that the Certificate IV was not enough to equip real novices with the skills to become a trainer straightaway. There were also doubts amongst the AEs about the push towards attracting novices into the field since the global recession circa 2008, with several questioning whether individuals were taking up ACTA as a "backdoor" option:

At the height of the SPUR funding and the economic considerations then, a lot of people were taking up the ACTA training perhaps as a backdoor. In our local terms we consider like a taxi driver license: just in case I have no other job, I shall go into training. It may meet their economic consideration but it may not therefore bring about trainers who are passionate about the job and when the times get better, they would probably leave the industry and all that (Colin, freelance, employability skills)

Beyond individual intentions, some of our interviewees described the idealised version of the adult education industry that the government wants to engender vis-à-vis the reality of a harsh, individualised and competitive training sector, as out-of-joint:

I think it's a bit idealistic. I think it's utopian, to be honest. I say this in the comfort of a nice little environment here. But when you're out in the real training environment, where everybody has his own agenda, everyone trying to make money, trying to make ends meet. It's very difficult to have this in mind. How you're going to engender that? You can have nice glitzy events, everyone comes and says, this is very important… But when you go back, you're back in the real practical, very pragmatic kind of environment. There's a disconnect. (Leon, permanent, TAE)

Cautioning against the formation of unreal, utopian, ideals, Leon later goes on to describe how the institutionalisation of communities of practice can be counter-productive to the professionalisation endeavour:

When we try to institutionalise all these communities of practice, a certain with-it-ness (being with-it) is lost. It becomes a bit too contrived. For me personally I don't like these events. I always find

that going there, everybody is going there with an agenda. It's very artificial, just doesn't feel quite right. I don't like it. I prefer knowing people slowly. Then after a few times, we bump into each other few times. Start to know each other a little better. Through whatever platform I got to understand where you're from, you going to understand where I'm from. From there maybe possibilities can happen. I prefer that organic kind of reaching out (Leon, permanent, TAE)

Leon sought to highlight what he felt was a disjuncture by juxtaposing the training landscape that consists of differentiated trainer profiles and intentions with a one-size-fits-all professionalisation approach. He champions, instead for an "organic kind of reaching out", and later in the conversation, highlights what he thinks has been more adequate attempts at inspiring new and subsequent generations of practitioners in the field:

I think what we're doing here [IAL] is a good thing. Through the DACE programme, through the masters programme, through improving on the ACTA programme. I think these are good start. You have people go through, when they have a good experience, when they go out there; they continue to light the fire. Hopefully they don't get snuffed out. Once you see the light, it's very difficult to not see anymore. But sometimes I am very mindful that sometimes they get disillusioned, and then they will leave. That's the problem with training. You open up people's eyes, people's hearts. They go back to the environment, whatever I learned, it's all nice and great, 'but it's not happening here, I'm not cut out for this'. That happens in teaching as well. That has to be sustained. The like-minded people need to continue to push for it. Then you see the snowballing effect after some time (Leon, permanent, TAE).

In sum, the adult educators we spoke to saw the landscape in which they operate in as complex and highly competitive, leading to mixed feelings towards the government's professionalisation agenda and signalling a need for more differentiated and responsive professional support and development. What also emerged from this series of discussions is that adult educators look forward to more "organic" forms of professionalisation rather than institutionalised forms. Whilst it is evident that adult educators can and do share tactics, the extent to which it is feasible to aspire to greater visibility of these in the current competitive environment are open to question, as is, more generally the adequacy of the notion of an adult educator 'professional identity'.

Practically accomplished, not designed

Heise (1990) proposed that careers are cultural structures that unfold in accordance with institutional rule systems; this allows individuals to build unique biographies with individualistic flair but suggests that they do so largely by voyaging along standard career trajectories in idiosyncratic combinations (ibid, p. 59). Through the earlier discussions on differentiation in occupational trajectories as well as the montage of actions that AEs take to manoeuvre through pressures and tensions of the adult education terrain, we see that the occupational journeys of adult educators in Singapore have largely been *practically accomplished, not designed* or laid out by a specific professionalisation agenda. These biographical narratives have revealed frequent instances where AEs have had to "make it up" as they go along self-invented pathways, tactically figuring out their next step in "idiosyncratic combinations".

It is important to note here that although adult educators are education workers, they are not the same as primary or secondary school teachers (who have now gained a professional, or semi-professional, status), and it is perhaps unreasonable to expect their professionalisation to mimic that of teachers. The professionalisation endeavour for AEs is normally contrasted with the "teaching" ideal, where in the case of Singapore, the state has much more control over who they train and place in schools. The main differences between adult educators and teachers is the 'hampering diversity', highly competitive, and largely privatised market that adult educators need to operate within, which create a markedly different landscape as compared to school teachers. Therefore, there looms a question of whether the occupation of being an adult educator could ever be successfully professionalised, or even semi-professionalised, in either the hard or weaker sense of the word (Jütte et al., 2011, p.16).

Although the discussions, hitherto, highlight the difficulties in this professionalisation agenda, they do not intend to suggest that the establishment of communities of practice and the development of a professional identity for AEs is necessarily an impasse. Like Leon had proposed in the earlier section about "reaching out" organically, other AEs similarly express preference for the gathering of like-minded individuals within the vocation through 'bottom-up' approaches. Molly, for example, speaks of her experience of collaboration with colleagues where she benefited from the sharing of ideas. The approach to the organisation of this community of practice was built on reciprocity.

> *What kept us together is the fact that when we come together, we were all willing to share. We're willing to create new things. We're not there to just absorb, absorb, absorb. So it's really a community of learning and sharing. And that is so key. If you have just a group where people come in and say, 'what's in for me only, and I'm not ready to share', it will not carry on. It will die a natural death. And they will be like I've learnt this before and why are you sharing this. Have you got anything new? That's not really very healthy for a group to continue… The core group were just four or*

> *five of us. But we will then organise regular sessions where we*
> *actually throw the invitation to members. And people are just so*
> *keen to come on. (Molly, freelance adult educator, generic skills)*

Devising their own tactics of informal professional development, this community of practice was formed out of Molly and her colleagues' own initiative. Through this grassroots approach they were able to draw others in to participate. To be sure, and to recap our earlier definition of the concept, professionalisation is not just about the development of informal communities of practice; it encompasses a sequence of structural changes involving the establishment of training institutions, formation of professional organisations and mastery of theoretical knowledge and skills involved in professional practice (Egetenmeyer, 2010). Nevertheless, Molly's example and the suggestions made by the other AEs lead us to ponder about the underlying principles of professionalisation of the AE sector – can it be designed, or is it practically accomplished? If there is to be a professionalisation blueprint, what kinds of principles should guide its design? Victor, a permanent adult educator training in the TAE framework, offered this analogy:

> *It's like building a beautiful oasis in a desert. But because it's a*
> *desert all around it, nobody is even around to come visit your*
> *oasis. The whole idea is to build something that when people*
> *come to it; it just draws them into it. They define value in it. They*
> *tell others about it. And that creates the motivation to want to do it.*

The challenge for this professionalisation endeavour, set against the backdrop of a differentiated workforce and a largely privatised market, is to find the balance between institutionalisation and affording AEs the space to occasion their own occupational pathways. The AEs must be able to "define value" in these activities. Only when their tasks possess meaning and purpose can their professional identities develop and encompass an individual's sense of "calling" to the field (Brott & Kajs, 2001).

Future: aspirations

To this point, we have examined facets of the past and present of our interviewees' life-course. In this section, we are concerned with how the past and present shape their aspirations and how these adult educators are planning forward. The introductory section of this paper highlighted from the literature reviewed that there are three main elements related to adult educator career trajectories: (i) moving "up" into managerial positions; (ii) growing and diversifying; (iii) and casualisation. From our discussion with the interviewees, it was revealed that there are intentions of growing and diversifying, as well as casualisation. Adult educators that were working full-time as permanent staff in training organisations shared their ambitions of wanting "move

into a more self-paced environment" (Victor, permanent adult educator, TAE). Similarly, Linda who works full-time training in the F&B sector is of the view that moving into a freelance position will free up more of her time:

> *At least I'm not tied down to all the company policies, annual leave, I do understand that benefits will not be there but at least I know I have more time. Especially if I want to upgrade myself if I want to take up more WSQ programme jobs, at least I know rather than I have a full time job I know that is a need. I have to turn them down because I have a full-time job because there is a school base here we cannot take part-time job or even freelance (Linda, permanent adult educator, F&B)*

Some like Eugene, who is currently already freelancing, specifically expressed his aim to re-orientate his occupational trajectory by going into consultancy:

> *Eventually I have to go to consultancy. Already I planned it 10 years ago. All this coming to IAL is intentional. I want to learn how to do research survey, how to write a research interview, how to interview people. Basically I am quite an impatient person. I don't have time for nitty gritty. If you want to do consultancy, you must know about what is happening.*

The propensity for adult educators to harbour ambitions of "cashing in" on their pedagogical and reputational capital is evident through such intentions of becoming a consultant or as in the case of Jenny, who said she aspires to write books where she will share her expertise in the area of adult education and competency-based training.

Amongst the adult educators, there were also individuals who aspire to "branch out" and venture overseas. Nate, a permanent adult educator in the hospitality sector, for example, wants to "branch out to the overseas market" from Singapore so that he can have "a bigger market". Eleanor had similar overseas ambitions:

> *In 10 years time, I will like to export ACTA, already exported ACTA out of Singapore. I think it's very exciting to be able to contribute to train-the-trainers programme in the region (Eleanor, permanent adult educator, TAE)*

It appears that these adult educators view the avenues for growing and diversifying to be located outside the shores of Singapore – in sites like Southeast Asia and the Middle East – and see their accumulation of experience in this field to be of use in these ventures.

None of the adult educators, however, indicated that they had desires to move "up" into managerial positions within the AE sector. One could hypothesise that this is because the pathways to managerial positions in the AE sector are not clear to the

trainers, or these positions are simply not coveted by the AEs. What this signals is the relatively 'flat' occupational structure of an AE's trajectory: career progression is not about getting a position within senior management in a training organisation, rather, a laudable and desirable accomplishment might be getting hired as a consultant or earning the label of 'master trainer' or expert. For those who do not want to remain in adult education, we found that they were desirous of returning to their 'home' industries. These adult educators come from sectors where possessing up-to-date specialised and domain knowledge is crucial – for example, the creative industries, engineering and nursing – bringing us back to the earlier discussion on 'perishability'. The implications of these findings deserve further scrutiny and will be discussed in the following and final chapter.

Conclusion

This research had set out to understand how adult educators conceptualise their professional identities, construct their career trajectories, and perceive the government-led professionalisation in their occupational field. We found that the personal detail of these individual journeys, including analysis of the modes of entry into adult education and training as work, and of the circumstances and events that have shaped occupational movement and transitions as adult educators, is counterpoised with a governmental agenda to professionalize vocationally-oriented adult education. A positive, but skeptical, attitude towards their professionalisation was evident in the accounts, with less than half of the participants viewing themselves as professional adult educators.

Our analysis of the accounts provides a foundation for professional development initiatives that can help CET trainers deal more effectively with career challenges and build pathways to pursue their diverse aspirations in adult education. By examining the factors that shape the occupational life-courses of adult educators, which are rendered invisible in the current rhetoric of professionalisation, the research brings into view influences on the working lives of adult educators that lie outside formal training and professional development. The research also illuminates the ways in which pedagogic work in highly specialized areas of knowledge and practice is vulnerable to the 'perishability' of domain expertise, and the role that pedagogic and other forms of capital can play in re-orientating an occupational trajectory (towards, for instance human resource management consultancy or venturing overseas). The lack of general visibility of these forces and consequent movements is compounded by the largely privatized nature of the field of adult vocational education in Singapore, in which a high proportion of practitioners are freelancers engaged by private, often competing, training organizations. These competitive conditions clearly create tensions with a wider aspiration to create a professional community with a shared professional identity. These findings in relation to policy and practice recommendations and implications will now be considered.

Entry points, differentiation & practical accomplishment

The major implication coming from the data on entry points speaks directly to professional development initiatives. The findings clearly unveil two distinct types of entry points, which come with difference levels of engagement in the adult education field. If professional development is seen as integral for all adult educators in order to improve the overall quality of workforce development provision, then perhaps professional development initiatives need to be more responsive to the different approaches and needs of the different types of adult educators. The current system does not, however, acknowledge this difference, instead offering "one-size-fits-all" certifications.

On the one hand, the "organic" adult educators have prior experience engaging in training related activities as a minor part of a non-training role. This experience offers exposure to a set of practices, which may shape the way that adult educators perform their work, and also the types of support they may feel they need. For some people this means they are confident to start training without engaging in formal professional development initiatives. This is an especially viable option for work outside the WSQ courses. For those who choose to work within the WSQ system, however, a minimum qualification is now mandatory. Currently the provision of this qualification is the same, regardless of one's prior experience with training roles. This may create resentment for individuals who consider their practice better than that offered in the course, or consider their abilities beyond those of the fellow novice classmates. Another point to note is that not all experience leads to best practice. Quite often people with experience in a particular field, such as training, may have to "undo" some of what they have learned in order to improve their practice. This again, may create resistance to new knowledge. These last two points illustrate characteristics particular to the group of adult educators who enter the field organically, which are not evident for those who enter through disjuncture.

Adult educators who enter the field due to a disjuncture from their prior work come with different "baggage". They may not have confidence in their ability to train as soon as they hit the floor, and they will not come with a set of existing pedagogic practices. Disjuncture, caused by a desired seachange, injury, burnout, or redundancy for example, potentially place these people in a position of relative vulnerability compared to their more experienced counterparts. This group may be more likely to share the needs of "first choice" adult educators, who have no exposure to what it is like to practice as an adult educator except for their imaginations. This group is likely to need a different type of support compared to their counterparts with more experience.

Attaining interest in professional development to improve the quality of training may be difficult for both groups. It is not unreasonable to posture that adults with a wealth of experience may come with hostility towards engaging in professional development. Some may believe it to be "beneath" them, or may not see it as relevant to doing a job where they are well versed in their content knowledge. The importance of the "invisible" skills of being a good adult educator may not apparent, or, gaining them, a

welcomed endeavour. This dilemma could either mean that adult educators do not pursue formal professional development, or pursue it without interest. Either way, learning from professional development is less likely to take place without participants valuing their potential new knowledge and skills.

Each group has different levels of need, as well as potentially hostile attitudes toward gaining certified pedagogic knowledge. Those with organic entry points may resent being forced to gain a qualification simply to meet a regulatory requirement (if demanded by an employer) when they see themselves as already knowing how to train. On the other hand they may be attracted to investing more deeply in pedagogic knowledge to deepen their expertise in how to deliver their content to their learners. For those with entry points of disjuncture the attainment of a formal training qualification may be an attractive starting point for learning about skills and knowledge that are lacking in their practice. At the same time, however, they may not see these skills and knowledge as necessary to perform their job sufficiently, especially if they see their time as an adult educator as a brief encounter without long-term commitment. Either way, a single classroom with a mix of experienced and novice adult educators is going to face great difficulties. It does not seem possible to provide the appropriate breadth and depth of skills and knowledge to meet particular needs through professional development initiatives that may not be responsive to these differences.

Beyond certification, the adult educator's work-life and livelihood is dependent on securing adequate training jobs. We discussed the importance of reputational capital in "getting jobs", and explored how individuals who are part of embedded networks (or the elusive "inner circle" of the training community) benefit from contacts that lead them to job opportunities. Although there is a tacit expectation that freelance trainers must continually 'market' and 'sell' themselves in order to get jobs, this separation of the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' in the freelance community generates resentment for the latter group. Matching adult educators who are searching for job opportunities with training institutes that require trainers must be an area looked into. Attempts to level or demonstrate a playing field that is fair could reduce hostility towards government-led professionalisation attempts. While no system of education and credentialing can perfectly align the rhetoric of certification with guaranteed positive labour market outcomes, it is crucial to provide a sense of assurance amongst adult educators that efforts are being made to ensure that any systemic disjuncture is being addressed. The challenges that freelance AEs face are real and could spiral into more complex troubles that could eventually hamper professionalisation if not dealt with. A dedicated study, adopting a social network approach (see for example Granovetter, 1995), on how AEs "get" their jobs could be conducted. Such a study could illuminate and deepen understanding of how (or whether) AEs use contacts and ties to clamour for training opportunities, or if other mechanisms are in place to facilitate these processes.

Finally, the practical accomplishments of adult educators must be recognised. There are pathways that have already been trekked or "invented" by adult educators in the community, and the montage of actions and occupational decisions they have taken are embodied in their individual professional identities. Instead of designing and creating new pathways laden with numerous activities and expectations, the feasibility of adapting pathways as adult educators traverse through their occupational trajectories should be considered; such an approach would eventually preclude a heavy reliance on government-led professionalisation. The question that looms within the professional milieus of adult educators in Singapore is whether they will be permitted to take the reins in building their own unique occupational biographies as well as whether they will be rendered the space and conditions to craft out professional pathways that are characterised by mutability and durability.

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