

**Rothe, Daniela (2011). Lifelong learning as a governmental programme: A discursive formation in adult education. Frankfurt, New York: Campus.**

### **Summary outline**

Part A: Lifelong learning in adult-education research - Patterns of references and research results

- 1 How the academic field of adult education observes education policy: Between analysis and duplication
- 2 Lifelong learning as a research programme in adult-education research
- 3 Theory and empirical evidence of learning over a lifetime
- 4 Interim conclusion and starting points for the analysis

Part B: Lifelong learning as a discursive formation in the field of educational policy - Theoretical basis and methodology

- 5 Specification of the research subject
- 6 Methodology

Part C: Analytical reconstructions

- 7 Temporal order of the discursive formation
- 8 Subjects of the discursive formation

Part D: Closing discussion

- 9 Lifelong learning as a governmental programme

Part E Appendix – Overview of the body of data

Literature / Bibliography

## Summary

After more than ten years of sustained discussion, the concept of lifelong learning has become widely established in the educational policy debate, in education science, and in everyday life, although its content has remained vague. The basic thesis proposed here is that its establishment can only be understood through the reciprocal/mutual referencing of education policy, education research and educational practice. This paper differentiates between these different levels of looking at lifelong learning and examines the discursive relationships between educational policy and adult-education research.

The first part focuses on the function of the term 'lifelong learning' in German adult-education research. In addition to a quite affirmative reception of the educational policy programme by the field, there is evidence of increasing efforts - both theoretical and empirical - to develop learning processes over a lifetime. Three key approaches emerge here: the biography-theoretical approach, the system-theoretical approach and the concept of governmentality. The productivity of the *biography theoretical approach* is shown in the empirical studies of 'paths of learning and education' published in recent years. A comparative analysis of selected works is used to show key elements of a theory of biographical learning that includes the inherent logic of biographical learning processes and their social dimension, as well as the interdependence of sociality and individual wilfulness, and the linking of learning processes across a lifetime. In addition to the system-theoretical perspective, which primarily sees lifelong learning as embedded in the context of the *universalisation of education*, the concept of *governmentality* is increasingly used in analysing and describing the social structuring of individual learning and educational processes, because it allows for developing a critical view of the intensification of learning over a lifetime, and for seeing the increasing individual options for action and possible potential for emancipation processes in connection with the assertion and spread of economic logistics in education.

Part Two elaborates on the analytic approach of the work, which follows the methodological considerations that Foucault developed in the archaeology of knowledge. The results of the discourse analysis are presented in Part Three, which begins with an analysis of the origins and spread of the educational concept of 'lifelong learning' in Germany. The increasingly close connection between national and international/European

educational policy becomes evident here. The reconstruction shows that educational science was systematically involved in producing the discourse. The discursive spread of the term 'lifelong learning' observed during the investigation period (1996-2006), which continually involves new (educational) policymakers and strives to commit members of society to the temporal extension and intensification of learning over the course of a lifetime, is linked to a systematic ignoring of the German education system's structural problems. The primary addressees of this discourse are, on the one hand, individuals who are called on to take control of and organise their own learning processes; and, on the other, education professionals, who are now merely granted a mediating and facilitating role in the learning process. As societal change is assumed to encompass all areas of life, the understanding of learning is narrowed to a process of individual adaptation. The analysis shows how, since the mid-1990s, the pull of educational policy on the individual has expanded systematically, and lifelong learning has become an imperative in living one's life. Besides the establishment of a new understanding of learning, this part of the work primarily examines the changing approach to discussing access to education. Here too, basic conceptual shifts are evident. The idea of establishing equal opportunity, which was central to previous attempts at educational reform, is discursively discredited and partially replaced by another regulative idea – educational equality. It no longer centres on analysing and lessening structural discrimination or on compensatory educational programmes, but on producing an optimal match between talent (to be identified) on the one hand, and the educational pathways and opportunities to be opened based on this innate talent on the other.

The final section discusses some implications that arise from the enforcement of learning as an imperative of living one's life, and a simultaneous failure to reform the structures of the education system. It also appears necessary that educational science should devote more theoretical and empirical attention to the relationship between discipline and education policy, and to become more critical again in discussing developments in educational policy.