

**Eero Pantzar**

## **Introduction to lifelong learning and adult education in Finland**

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## **Abstract**

### **Eero Pantzar (2007): Introduction to lifelong learning and adult education in Finland**

Eero Pantzar presents the outlines of the development of adult education in Finland from the early beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to today. Popular education was seen as one of the necessary preconditions for the growth of general welfare, economic development and the individual's personal growth. The first decades of the nation's independence (1917 -) saw a strong boom in liberal adult education. This was most clearly indicated by the growing number of institutions and organisations providing adult education and other educational activities.

The majority of laws governing adult education were enacted in the 1960s and 1970s. In general, the laws in question define the objectives for activities being pursued, the terms and conditions for financial support from the state as well as the proportional level thereof.

The financing of adult education varies as per the partial area in question. The most interesting observation in financial terms is how much students are required to pay for their studies.

Over the past few decades, Finnish people have participated very actively in adult education. According to various statistics, over 40% of adults participate in some type of study on an annual basis. This figure applies to institutional (formal and non-formal) education and training.

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## **The roots of adult education in Finland**

The birth of popular education is understood to provide the basis for adult education in its present-day form. This development is generally seen to have taken place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The intention of this article is to identify the roots and outset of those cultural and educational activities that were targeted at Finnish adults, the historical continuum of which is represented by our current adult education. It is undoubtedly clear that the beginning of adult education (popular education) in Finland was not exclusively due to national ideas and local activities. In addition, there were other influences of an external, international origin that provided a significant contribution.

Industrialisation and enlightenment are mentioned most frequently as phenomena that have changed European society to a significant degree, and which also influenced the beginning of adult education in Finland. It took several decades before the effects of both became discernible in Finnish society, and those of industrialisation were even slower to appear.

Prior to the initial phase of adult education in its present-day form, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland was the most significant provider of popular education for adults. The Church was very efficient in teaching people to read, primarily to promote the declaring of its own message. The literacy skills thus acquired proved to be a valuable tool and the foundation in subsequent popular education activities embarked upon by other sectors. In addition to the Church, there were several non-clerical ideologies and movements that had realised the role and importance of popular education – due to enlightenment and other currently prevailing ideas. Consequently, popular education was seen as one of the necessary preconditions for the growth of general welfare, economic development and the individual's personal growth. In addition to the previously mentioned – nationalism, liberalism and the labour movement are mentioned among the underlying factors for enlightenment and educational activities – all of which were also of an external origin. The youth association movement and the temperance movement were predominantly national movements, the significance of which cannot be overlooked in the promotion of popular education. Naturally, there were also other ideas and movements that had discernible local features.

The role and importance of nationalism has often been seen as a central empowering factor that ignited and strengthened the provision of popular education for adults. The idea behind educating the masses was that once they become educated the less fortunate would be increasingly motivated to engage in the development of society as a whole (e.g. Lahtinen 2006; Toiviainen 1999).

However, one must not forget that those who had participated in popular enlightenment and education work also had the significant task of promoting the dissemination and adoption of their ideas and thoughts among citizens. The systematic promotion of these objectives also created a foundation for organised popular education activities that started gradually during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Adult education institutions' early activities**

### ***Popular educational organisations***

It can be said that the organising of a modern adult education system in Finland started when the KVS Foundation (Kansanvalistusseura) was established. Prior to this, there had been initial enlightenment efforts undertaken by a number of popular movements, which did not extend beyond the limits of ideological work, however. The KVS Foundation was established in 1874, based on a national romantic view of popular education.

At the same time, the establishment of this organisation was connected to the awakening Finnish nationalist movement.

Study circle activities became the kernel of other popular education organisations' work. In its current form, liberal adult education started from the establishment of the Workers' Education Association in 1919. Thus, it may be stated that educational organisations are of a younger origin in the field of liberal adult education, compared to residential folk high schools and adult education centres. It has been argued that the beginning of education provision by associations was delayed by the establishment and increasing activities of these two educational establishment types. This argument cannot be considered as far-fetched. Residential folk high schools endeavoured to satisfy the educational needs of young adults living in the countryside. Adult education centres had the same task among the urban population (Karjalainen 1970).

### ***Residential folk high schools***

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, residential folk high schools had gained a strong position in popular education in the Nordic Countries. The model for this type of education, which was originally Danish, was also introduced to Sweden. Finland's first residential folk high school was established in Kangasala in 1889.

The background of residential folk high schools was strongly based on various popular movements. Instead of by the public sector (the state and municipalities), residential folk high schools were established by various organisations and popular movements. These were all based on the Grundtvigian idea of folk high schools as critical schools of life that were to be independent of the authorities. In addition to other popular movements, a significant number of residential folk high schools were established by various Christian movements. On the whole, residential folk high schools were established at an extremely high pace. By the 1920s, Finland had more than 40 residential folk high schools (Marjomäki 1989).

The establishment of residential folk high schools provided increasing educational opportunities for the young and young adults, especially in the countryside. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, residential folk high schools offered opportunities for both general education and for the development of basic vocational skills. Among other goals, residential folk high schools endeavoured to educate people to become good citizens. The subjects being studied mainly served the needs that were directly required to cope with life in the countryside. Even during their early existence, residential folk high schools offered their students the opportunity for social rise, for example, through employment outside the agrarian community, contrary to their parents' traditions. This became clearly apparent in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

(Pantzar 1989). Nevertheless, it must be remembered that there were also other factors contributing to the change of people's source of livelihood in society.

### ***Adult education centres folk high schools (Volkshochschulen)***

Adult education centres in Finland devised their model from the Workers' Educational Institute that was established in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1880 (Stockholms Arbetarinstitut). Subsequently, the development of workers' educational centres in Sweden deviated from that of their Finnish counterparts. The purpose of establishing workers' educational centres was to offer general education and social studies, mainly to workers living in urban and densely populated industrial areas. The objective was to improve the level of general education among this demographic group.

The workers' educational institute movement may be considered to have started in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, regardless of the fact that the first institute had been established in Tampere as early as 1899. On the one hand, the network of workers' educational institutes was quite slow to expand during its first decades, even if there was a discernible growth in the number of students, on the other. Furthermore, the provision of studies diversified during the first years of operation. During the first couple of decades of their operation, workers' educational institutes were also compelled to take a stand on their societal status, especially when asked whom to direct their services to. By the early 1920s, workers' educational institutes were increasingly seen as educational establishments for the entire population. The discussion also focused on the institution's name. People increasingly saw the entire adult population as the target group, which also increased the support for *adult education centre* as the institution's name. The long history of this debate is clearly indicated by the still on-going practice of using both terms in reference to the educational establishments in question (e.g. Karjalainen 1970; Alanen 1985; Huuhka 1990; Tuomisto 1992).

The significance of workers' educational institutes in towns and densely populated industrial areas was similar to that of residential folk high schools in the countryside. Both endeavoured to offer an easily accessible opportunity to study, either something totally new, or to consolidate and complement earlier learning achievements. Both institutions can be seen to have exerted an important educational influence and contribution to social equality, even during their early years, about a hundred years ago.

## **Towards a contemporary form of adult education**

The first decades of the nation's independence saw a strong boom in liberal adult education. This was most clearly indicated by the growing number of institutions and organisations providing adult education and other educational activities. In addition, their geographical expansion throughout Finland was a typical feature of these activities. In particular, this growth was observed as the developing network of adult education centres and the work pursued by various educational organisations. Nevertheless, the network of residential folk high schools had emerged earlier and developed much quicker. It was natural that the number of people studying at adult education centres increased as the network of centres expanded. The provision of studies complied with the early times' ideals, including general education and social studies.

This development was not exclusively launched and promoted by the mere understanding of education's significance as such. The question was about social development, and about the needs of a young independent nation to consolidate and complement her previous cultural and educational shortcomings, and in general, to offer adults the new knowledge required at each historical phase.

It may be justifiably argued that, even shortly after World War 2 (WW 2), our overall organisation that arranged and provided adult education services was almost exclusively based on liberal adult education – that is adult education centres, residential folk high schools and educational organisations. However, this should never be interpreted as the non-existence of vocational education for adults, which had been available for a long time, albeit at a considerably low scale, and without a distinct organisation, compared to the present situation.

The core of the Finnish adult education system still consisted of the same components that it had been founded on, especially after the country had gained its independence in 1917. The organisation did not expand to a significant degree after World War 2, before the mid-1960s. Naturally, the number of people studying at adult education centres increased as did the provision of studies. Finnish society's political and other societal tensions, including conflicts between various demographic groups, reflected strongly upon the educational organisations' activities. It was only later that the tensions and conflicts began to discharge, at a gradual pace. With regards to residential folk high schools, the most considerable change was that, in the post-WW 2 period, they ceased to be regarded as educational establishments exclusively intended for young people living in the countryside.

## **Educational institutions today**

### ***General adult education***

Opportunities to acquire formal qualifications based on examinations and partial examinations are mainly offered by adult senior secondary schools, open universities' continuing education centres and summer universities. Open universities have also offered studies through other institutions, chiefly adult education centres and residential folk high schools.

*Adult senior secondary schools* (operating at 40 locations throughout Finland) are educational establishments that provide adults with study courses at the comprehensive school level and senior secondary school level. On one hand, there has been a slight decrease in the number of students attending adult senior secondary schools over the past few years. On the other hand, an interesting observation is that the student's age structure has changed at the same time – the proportional share of older generations is currently increasing. The majority of students are women.

*Open university studies* comply with the universities' basic studies with regards to their content and requirements. There are no formal entrance requirements for these studies. Open university studies are mainly offered by universities' continuing education centres and summer universities. Open universities do not provide examinations but students may use their study achievements as a compensation in cases where they receive the right to study corresponding university courses.

*Summer universities* are maintained by various non-public corporations that often operate on a regional basis. In addition to open university studies, summer universities arrange language courses and further training for professionals in various fields, for example. Even at summer universities, the clear majority of students are women. The students' age distribution is wider than, for example, that of universities' continuation centres.

### ***Liberal adult education***

#### *Adult education centres*

Finland has over 250 adult education centres that offer study opportunities for adults, practically in every municipality throughout the country. Over the past few years the centres have enrolled about 600,000 students per annum. The students' age distribution is extremely wide. In practice, there are citizens participating from all age groups. Over the past four decades, the adult education centres' students have been predominantly women. During this period there has even been a slight increase in the share of women.

When comparing the present situation to the early 1970s, the adult education centres' provision of studies has changed to a certain degree. Practical subjects, arts subjects and foreign languages have persistently remained as the most popular subjects for almost 40 years. A typically more recent, very popular newcomer among curriculum subjects is that of ICT providing a wide variety of new knowledge on information and communication technologies. This is also an excellent example of the rapid response to the educational needs involving all citizens in a quickly changing society.

#### *Residential folk high schools*

Our country's 90 residential folk high schools represent a long tradition of liberal adult education. In addition, they are a prime example of an area of education that has been compelled to change due to the drastic structural turmoil involving our education system in its entirety. During the recent periods of their history residential folk high schools have sought their place in the national system of education, and have even fought for their existence. Rising to these challenges has enabled them to develop in new directions. Residential folk high schools have managed to provide young adults with alternative choices, increasingly enabling them to study an extra preparatory year prior to their university studies. There was a period during which vocational education appeared to be a potential area of growth for residential folk high schools. However, this did not prove to be a lasting solution when seeking a new profile.

#### *Study centres*

Educational organisations have a total number of 11 study centres that implement their adult education activities. The educational organisations' background associations consist of various ideological civic organisations – from political parties to hobby-related central organisations. Study centres have conventionally operated through study circles whose activities were complemented by course provision and public lectures, due to a legislation reform made in the 1980s.

Over the past few decades, however, the strictly ideological approach has become more tolerant, at least when compared to the post-WW 2 situation and atmosphere. The change is due to a number of reasons. Firstly, strictly ideological boundaries have almost disappeared from Finnish society, and study centres have extended their activities beyond 'their own parameters'. Secondly, young citizens especially are interested in complex societal issues that cannot be seen as the property of any 'old ideology'.



## ***Vocational adult education***

The first act and decree that governs vocational adult education entered into force as late as 1966. During the 1960s, Finnish society had to rise to the challenges of the on-set of rapid societal change and the resulting large number of adults without vocational education. This resulted in a qualified workforce shortage, chiefly in the so-called growth centres.

The next major reform in vocational education legislation took place in 1976. A significant feature of this reform was that the labour force authorities' position was strengthened in the sphere of labour force policy based adult education. Vocational adult education centres, vocational schools and colleges became the most important providers of this education. In addition, universities acquired a more significant role, especially in the area of academic employment training.

### *Self-initiated vocational adult education*

The entire field of vocational adult education may be divided into the following forms: Self-initiated vocational adult education, labour force policy based adult education, personnel training and apprenticeship training.

### *Self-initiated vocational training*

This training consists of student-initiated study projects. Supportive studies and other opportunities for study are offered by almost all adult education subsectors – naturally, the majority of courses are being arranged by vocational adult education units. The intention has also been to support self-initiated vocational studies through various financial arrangements, which may also be allocated to unemployed people, among other citizens.

### *Labour force policy based adult education*

The labour force authorities play the central role in the provision of labour force policy based adult education. The term refers to the type of adult education that is purchased by the authorities in question for unemployed people or for their unemployment threatened clients. Implemented courses involve all types of vocational adult education: basic education, further training and retraining. Compared to the 1970s and 1980s, the number of organisations that provide labour force policy based adult education has increased significantly. In addition to the ordinary education system, there are various education businesses and consultant organisations participating. Nevertheless, the main part of this education continues to be provided by vocational adult education centres that were originally established for this task in particular.

### *Personnel training*

On one hand, personnel training constitutes the partial vocational adult education area with the highest number of participants. On the other hand, it is the most difficult one to define in organisational terms. The bulk of this education is of a short-term duration and financed by employers. Participation in this type of training is generally an employment-related responsibility required by the employer. The education or training in question may be implemented in the form of an in-house course arranged by the employer. Most of these courses are arranged by major corporations or organisations. Over the past few years, personnel training has been increasingly outsourced, to be the responsibility of external expert organisations.

### *Apprenticeship training*

The tradition and position of apprenticeship training has been rather weak in Finland. Especially since the 1990s, efforts have been taken to expand apprenticeship training, and to make it more attractive, as a method of acquiring and upgrading vocational competence, even for adults (e.g. Kumpulainen 2006).

## **Legislation**

On one hand, adult education legislation only applies to those organisational units and activities that are financed by the public sector. On the other hand, these constitute a significant portion of all activities pursued in Finland. In practice, the entire field of liberal adult education (folk high schools, residential folk high schools, popular education organisations and summer universities) receives a varying amount of support from the state, in accordance with the statutory stipulations in question. Like other education sectors, vocational adult education is strictly regulated by laws that partly coincide with the labour force policy legislation. In the area of general adult education, the legislation applies to higher adult education (e.g. open universities) and adult senior secondary schools. Personnel training provided by companies and other organisations constitutes the most important area that remains outside educational legislation.

The majority of laws governing adult education were enacted in the 1960s and 1970s.

In general, the laws in question define the objectives for activities being pursued, the terms and conditions for financial support from the state as well as the proportional level thereof. Some of the laws also define the qualifications of full-time teachers and other personnel.

## **Financing**

The financing of adult education varies as per the partial area in question. The most interesting observation in financial terms is how much students are required to pay for their studies. Naturally, the price chiefly depends on the amount of other financing available. From a student's point of view, the study price range may vary from totally free of charge to self-financed studies at the current market price. Labour force policy based education, for example, is totally free of charge. Studies in the area of liberal adult education are mostly quite affordable for students, due to the state support received by the education provider organisation, and the maintainer organisation's participation in the costs. On the other hand, the share of education payable by the student in its entirety has increased in several adult education sectors. In order to finance their activities, several education organisations, which receive state support for some of their activities, may also offer various further training courses that are fully payable by the student.

## **Participation**

Over the past few decades, Finnish people have participated very actively in adult education. According to various statistics, over 40% of adults participate in some type of study on an annual basis. This figure applies to institutional (formal and non-formal) education and training. Accurate data is not available concerning adults' self-initiated studies. When analysing the development over the past few decades, it can be clearly seen that participation in vocational adult education has increased the most vigorously of all. In addition, a similar increase has taken place in certain areas of general adult education. This applies to open universities, among others. Liberal adult education has remained the most popular area of participation for many decades, retaining a steady number of students.

When analysing the participant profile, two significant observations can be made at the general level: Firstly, the well-educated and adults in a better financial position participate more actively than the others. Secondly, it is interesting to observe that the proportional share of women appears to increase continually. It has been conventionally the highest in all areas of non-vocational study.

## **Staff**

Pedagogic adult education staff can be divided into three categories: full-time staff, part-time staff and separately employed staff. Full-time pedagogic staff in adult education are employed by various educational establishments in executive positions (as principals, etc.) or as full-time teachers of various subjects. These people work in liberal adult education and vocational adult education establishments. From the point of view of adult education, part-time staff is employed on a full-time basis by educational establishments that provide both basic education and adult education. Separately employed visiting teachers are the largest staff group in Finnish adult education. The majority of them are employed by adult education centres.

Full-time teachers employed in Finnish adult education are well-educated. The statutory competence requirement is mostly a Master's degree plus the official pedagogic qualification. Adult pedagogic training for part-time teachers has also been adequately available. Participation has been very active.

A significant feature in terms of full-time staff training is that Finland has a long tradition of adult education studies at the university level, and that adult education is currently a major subject in eight Finnish universities. This figure can be considered to be relatively high on the global scale.

## **International contacts**

In fact, Finnish adult education has had a variety of international contacts, starting from its early days. These contacts have been maintained by adult educators and adult education researchers alike. When analysing the roots of Finnish adult education, one must mention the significant background factors arising from Great Britain, Central Europe and the Nordic Countries.

The analysis of adult education's recent history highlights several trends that are characteristic of the said international contacts:

- Co-operation between the Nordic Countries has been intensive since the 1960s. During the past few years, however, it has been predominantly maintained by field organisations, compared to individual researchers, for example.
- Research-related international contacts, and those between researchers increased markedly in the late 1970s and early 1980s. European and North American contacts have had the highest frequency.
- Finland's EU membership has strengthened and diversified our European contacts.

## Research

In actual fact, it may be said that Finnish adult education research did not start properly until a professorship in popular education (subsequently adult education) was established in the School of Social Sciences (subsequently the University of Tampere). This establishment, which took place more than 60 years ago (1946), is considered to be the earliest in the whole of Europe. For more than thirty years, the office in question was the only one of its kind in Finland. Subsequently, a professorship in adult education was established in the University of Helsinki (1980). This started a new phase, during which most of our universities offering education studies obtained a chair in adult education (or in a corresponding discipline). In some cases, the post-1990s development has meant the re-organisation of offices, due to concrete re-organisation needs arising from other phenomena that are typical of the prevailing university culture. The actual number of professorships has not increased further.

Adult education's current trends, as well as its prevailing status, are not necessarily that interesting to the world of science at large. Consequently, it is often justified to see research into adult education and related studies as a part of a wider scientific entity, such as education, on the one hand. On the other hand, adult education involves several phenomena of societal significance pertaining to citizens' daily lives, and to working life in particular. In terms of research, the challenges of lifelong and life-wide learning have increased the need for pure adult education research.

When assessing the development of adult education research, getting a comprehensive picture is impaired by the varying relevance of the source material. Consequently, some of the development-related statements are based on indirect conclusions. As late as up until the 1970s, adult education research was pursued on a modest scale, compared to the present. In general, these minor activities were fairly visible to the public at large, however. Subsequently, the scope of adult education research has expanded and extended to other disciplines outside adult education and education in general. The number of research-based reporting forums has increased significantly. This means that finding relevant contributions of a high standard requires a considerable amount of work. This development seems to have strengthened further in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Such increasing interest indicates that adult education is gaining societal importance and, at least for the time being, undergoing continual expansion.

On a more general basis than for previous ones, the research objects of this study can be divided into popular education oriented, vocational education oriented or multidisciplinary projects. On the basis of two previous analyses, one of which deals with research conducted

in 1978-81 (Pantzar 1985) and the other with that conducted in 1993-97 (Rinne/Vanttaja 1998), clear development trends are uncovered. The most visible change in the orientation of research is the significant growth of vocational adult education research (the proportion of which grew from just over 20% to about 60%) and the considerable decrease of popular education (from 43% to 10%). The proportion of multidisciplinary research projects, or those with some other orientations, also decreased to a certain degree.

During this period of almost 15 years, at least two significant changes took place in terms of Finnish adult education and its orientation. *One* was the strong emergence of vocational adult education, which manifested itself as the emphasised significance of this area in the national education policy, on the one hand, and as the intensive growth of vocational adult education as a part of adult education as a whole, on the other. *The other* change, which affected the orientation of research, consisted of new priorities being given to research resource allocation, plus the emergency of new resource sources that had a special interest in research into vocational adult education and learning at work.

Regardless of the fact that comprehensive empiric studies have not been conducted pertaining to the content of adult education research from the past 10 years, a number of summaries can be made, however, based on other source materials, such as abstracts published in academic journals and university thesis papers, among others. Firstly, when analysing the orientation of research towards the adult education organisations' main areas – popular education, vocational adult education and adult education at large – it appears that interest in research into popular education has diminished further. At present, it almost seems to be dying out. The strengthening of research into vocational adult education has reached a stable phase. On the other hand, it is necessary to notice that conventional research into vocational adult education is being paralleled and partly replaced by a type of research that is connected with people's occupational development but focuses on different aspects. This new orientation is represented by research projects whose sphere can be defined, for example, as learning organisations or learning at work. Research of this type has clearly gained momentum in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The number of multidisciplinary research projects seems to have remained at the level of the 1990s. However, a change has taken place in what these comprehensive adult education research projects actually deal with. Themes that have become more dominant include lifelong learning, education policy and learning environment issues.

When speaking about content, it is always interesting to examine how adult education research, and its various orientations, have been appreciated at different times. Among appreciation indicators, the level of research funding is one of the most field-proven ones, especially when referring to so-called competed funding (such as research funding by the Academy of Finland). In this context, interesting questions are, for example, the following:

- The division of funding. Are accumulations possible on certain research content areas?
- Has the funding accumulated on specific research units?
- Are the most general research theme areas prone to receive the most significant share of funding?

When examining the Academy of Finland's resource allocation as a whole (project funding and offices) one clearly perceives that the strongest areas in adult education research during the past few years (2003-06) have been those of conventional vocational adult education or those arising from its tradition and continuing learning at work, including developmental work

projects. Another clearly emerging area is constituted by themes relating to education policy and the sociology of education.

The division of funding among the various research units indicates that significant research into adult education is also being conducted outside the scientific sphere of education. To comment on the accumulation of research funds in general, one can point out some of the recipients: the on-going research projects conducted by the Department of Education of the University of Turku, and those of the Centre for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research of the University of Helsinki.

It is no surprise that the themes which are being examined most intensively at the moment are the same as receive the greatest appreciation in the form of resource allocation in adult education research. It also appears that this interdependency came into being through the research results achieved. It has generated resources allowing fruitful progress of a high standard on an extensive basis.

Then, how is adult education perceived by the public at large? And how are its various research projects with different themes seen in particular? In the national context, an appropriate basis for visibility assessments does not exist, due to the fact that Finland has no forums, visibility on which would also mean the fulfilling of specific quality criteria. Consequently, I ended up making a small-scale analysis of how Finnish adult education research is seen internationally. I used two scientific publications' identification systems. One of them is fairly new and still being developed, namely the Google Scholar search service (GS), which offers an easy way to find contributions from various disciplines and sources: treatises, lectures, books, abstracts and articles produced by academic publishers, communities, information sources, universities and scientific organisations (GS 2006). My other source was the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI). The relevance of the index is not the best possible for this purpose because it strongly focuses on Anglo-American publications. This actually means that any other publications, especially in languages other than English, will not be found at all. The cross-application of the two sources (GS and SSCI) dispelled the risk of one-sidedness to such a degree that I have the courage to present the following brief summary of the international visibility of Finnish adult education research:

Based on the number of Google Scholar hits and the number of citations, as well as the number of SSCI citations, it was easy to observe that if a research project receives domestic appreciation, it will also become internationally visible. This cannot be considered as very surprising. Based on the number of personal hits and amount of citation per hit, research into activity theory and developmental work research are, indisputably, the most visible research activities.

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