Both the educational scientist and the economist are interested in the outcomes of the vocational and adult education system. Education theory centres on school effectiveness and seeks the factors which explain the effectiveness of schools. Effectiveness can be measured in terms of learning outcomes but also in terms of employment and earning capacity. This is where the economist comes into the picture: he or she is also interested in effects as seen in terms of returns from investment in education. Access to training is not the same for everyone. Some workers are offered more opportunities for investment in training than others. As investment in human capital (e.g. training) creates inequality between workers, these differences in training participation increase social inequality (wage inequality, employment opportunities, etc.). It seems that on-the-job training is becoming an increasingly more important source of human capital investment.

Human capital theory makes a distinction between general and specific human capital. General human capital comprises skills which can be made productive in all firms; specific human capital relates to training which can only be made productive at one specific firm.

The increased attention to training by firms, unions and policy makers has been associated with an increase in workers’ participation in training.

Groot surveys the results of some recent studies on training. Does participation in training differ between groups of workers? Is participation in training determined by individual characteristics or job characteristics - or both? What are the returns from training for firms and for individual workers?

The value of the training investment is usually mainly observable to the participant him or herself - to the worker and his or her current employer -
and not to any other employer. The National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) in the United Kingdom serve to certify and standardise training investment. This form of certification may decrease uncertainty among employers about the value of the training. It may, on the other hand, increase poaching, as information about the quality of training the worker has taken becomes more widely available.

What factors are associated with participation in continuing training? Which activities influence an employed adult’s decision to participate in these activities? Evaluating, characterising and understanding active adults’ behaviour in relation to continuing training activities will make an important contribution to the design and setting up of adequate, effective and efficient continuing qualification programmes. Continuing qualification of the human resources constitutes a *sine qua non* condition for increasing business effectiveness - which is essential for economic progress.

Participation in continuing vocational education and training activities constitutes the most effective strategy to both increase and maintain workers’ employability (employment/self-employment) and keep human resources permanently qualified in order to respond to external changes. Over the last two decades, given the introduction of new technologies and increased business competition, rapid changes have been occurring in the organisation of production and the structure of employment and unemployment.

Analysing and understanding, as Figuira does, the nature of the factors and the relationships associated with active adults’ participation in training activities constitutes an important basis for formulating adequate and effective policies and strategies for the different socio-professional groups. Knowledge and understanding of the participation phenomenon in training activities allows the stronger and more adequate setting up and implementation of strategies aimed at sensitising the active population in general and the socio-professional groups in particular to the importance of their continuing and systematic participation in learning activities. Participation results from the interaction between external context, social background, personality, attitudinal dispositions, retained information and situational aspects.

Participation in educational programmes or in learning on the job can have several effects. Many factors influence the training and its consequences. The question is, which of the impacts - and to what extent - are really due to the training. The effectiveness of training or education may have a narrow or a broad definition. From a narrow point of view, the operationalisation of the effectiveness is based only on some quantitative