THEMATIC ISSUE OF RELA: APPROACHES TO RESEARCH IN THE EDUCATION AND LEARNING OF ADULTS

Submission deadline: April 15, 2012

LEAD EDITORS FOR THIS ISSUE: ANDREAS FEJES & KATHERINE NICOLL

Research in the education and learning of adults is diverse and draws inspiration from quite different traditions and conceptual domains across Europe. Where it has emerged as a separate domain, this has been attributed to a conceptual separation of the adult learner from the child that emerged from the 1960s in many European countries. ‘Andragogy’, as the science of the teaching and learning of adults, is identified by some as first distinguished from pedagogy in the work of Alexander Kapp in Germany in 1833. Later it was taken up in the US by Lindeman and Anderson in the 1920s (Lindeman 1926), and became quite commonly known through the work of Malcolm Knowles in the 1970s and 80s. During this later part of the 20th Century research in adult education and learning took up concepts and approaches from psychology and the humanities, and humanist ideals, steeped in universal notions of human development, progression, democracy, equality and emancipation, to shape what became a distinct trajectory. More recently other disciplines and domains have contributed theoretical and methodological inspiration; cultural and gender studies, policy studies, and working life research as some examples. Research on the education and learning of adults is now interdisciplinary, and although perhaps still closely related to that of the wider field of education research it has a specific flavour in its agendas and concerns.

The differing agendas and concerns for adult education and learning research have shaped the various theoretical and methodological emphases. These have been distinctive in their geographical location, trajectories, conceptualisations, re-conceptualisations and re-emergences. They have been geographically mobile. We can see, for example, how the emancipatory work of Paulo Freire had a huge impact on research and policy practice in South America, and was then taken up in Europe and other locations. A transformative learning theory developed by Jack Mezirow in the US, significantly shaped research on the education and learning of adults, especially in the US; this is particularly visible when looking at the contents of the American journal Adult Education Quarterly. Biographical research also, prominent now in adult education and learning research in Europe, has spawned the largest research network in ESREA and numerous publications on the topic. Critical social theory is yet another theoretical terrain that has been influential and from

1 France, Holland and Yugoslavia are specifically mentioned by Davenport (1987, in Holmes and Abington-Cooper, 2000).

2 Holmes and Abington-Cooper (2000) and Cooper and Henschke (2001) identify the term - andragogy - used by the German teacher Kapp as the oldest known use in a published document. This observation is attributed to a work by the Nottingham Andragogy Group (1983).
which researchers draw inspiration for its transformative possibilities. And, during the last decades we can see an increasing number of post-structural theorizations with critical aims.

There is then a dispersion of theoretical and methodological perspectives mobilised in and through research. These afford quite specific questions to be asked and answers found in relation to particular agendas and concerns. Each approach to research is thus productive in quite specific ways, but also has limitations.

In this issue of RELA we aim to i) exemplify new approaches to theory and methodology in research in adult education and learning, but, also, ii) focus discussion, at least in part, on the productivities and limitations of these. In this way we want to generate the possibility for further and critical discussion. That is to say, we especially invite papers that take up new and emerging theories and methodologies in adult education and learning research and discuss their capacity for contribution to the terrain of which they are part and in relation to specific agendas and concerns.

We then invite two different kinds of papers for this issue:

- empirical analyses that mobilize clearly defined and described theoretical and methodological perspectives. Attention by the author(s) should be given to positioning the paper in the theoretical and/or methodological field and in considering how the perspective is both limited and productive in shaping the research questions in a particular way and in relation to specific purposes and/or agendas and concerns.

- those providing an overview of the theoretical and/or methodological terrain for research on the education and learning of adults, and/or discussion of limitations and productivities of differing perspectives. This could for example be a literature review, and/or analytic piece.

References


