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Editorial: cartographies of research on adult education and learning

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Introduction

The field of research on the education and learning of adults has changed dramatically over the last decades. Some have analysed these changes through various forms of what we characterise here as ‘cartographies’. Cartographies are attempts to map out particular conditions, developments or trends. In the field of adult education and learning such mapping has been done in quantitative ways through bibliometric analyses, but also through qualitative and critical approaches. These are important contributions to reflexive engagement, to our understanding of what is going on in the field, and to considering the forces that shape and dominate it.

Bibliometric analysis, for example, considers the field as it is represented through journal publications. This has led to a number of observations regarding the research approaches that dominate, i.e. a historical emphasis on Anglophone authors in the publication of research, description of the field (see e.g. Larsson, 2010, Fejes & Nylander, 2014) and specific gendered and age related biases. If the publication of research in the field can be taken as an indicator of the amount of research carried out, it appears through such analysis that quantitative research has reduced over the years and qualitative research has increased (cf. Taylor, 2001; Fejes & Nylander, 2015). Theoretically speaking, socio-cultural perspectives, critical pedagogy, and post-structural theorisations currently dominate (see Fejes and Nylander in this issue). Such observations have, we feel, crucially supported analytic discussions concerning the dynamics and mechanisms shaping the field as socio-cultural practice.

There is a dominance of Anglophone authors publishing in the international journals, both in terms of numbers of published and most cited articles (cf. Taylor, 2001, Fejes & Nylander, 2014). Yet, the number of articles by non-Anglophone authors seems to have increased slightly during the last few years (cf. Harris & Morrison, 2011, St. Clair, 2011, Taylor, 2001). Furthermore, there has been a shift from male to female dominance (cf. Taylor, 2001). These are only a few observations illustrated through such analyses - there are numerous other observations focusing on a range of aspects, such as how gender perspectives are taken up within the field, and to what extent there

is a focus on certain groups, such as older learners. However, two of the many limitations of these sorts of studies are that they do not include analyses of national or regional research contexts other than the Anglophone contexts and that they focus on journal publications only. These limitations are partly addressed in this issue by Bernd Käßplinger who analyses conference papers presented at European conferences, rather than journal articles in Anglophone journals. Similarly, Kjell Rubenson and Maren Elfert, in this issue, include a sample of journals representing a wider geographical distribution than previous journals analysed, thus providing a possibility to widen the debate.

Another strand of relevant literature on cartographies of adult education research can be found in edited collections of research, bringing researchers together to debate what constitutes the field of research and asking questions about where the field is going. These seem to come and go at intervals. In 1964 the “Black book” was published, in which American scholars of that time reflected on the field (Jensen et al., 1964). This was followed by the “Blue book” in 1991 (Peters et al., 1991). A book edited by Bright (1989) brought together authors writing about the epistemology of the field. Other discussions related to the distinction between andragogy and pedagogy emerged in a non-Anglophone context (e.g. Ten Have, 1973, Savicevi, 1991), a topic also taken up by Knowles (1970) in the North-American American context. These sorts of publications have been influential in shaping research understandings of the field and what is identified as ‘new’ and important.

The ambition of this thematic issue on cartographies of research of the field is to bring together a range of papers, participating in different ways to the construction of the field as it is shaped in contemporary times. A specific ambition of this issue, which is of particular interest to RELA, was to bring together scholars from different parts of Europe and beyond, in order to debate issues at stake in adult education in Europe. We hope these cartographies, authored by colleagues from Sweden, Canada, Germany, Denmark and France, will provide a ground for scientific reflexivity about the field, where it stands today and how it is shaped and influenced.

Introducing the articles

The five thematic papers of this issue can be clustered in two groups: The first three provide bibliometric analyses of the field by focusing on journal publication and conference papers. The second group includes two papers focusing on specific research areas in the field of adult education. Below we provide short introductions to these five papers as well as the two open papers in this issue.

Bibliometrical analyses of the field

In the first paper, the two Swedish scholars, Andreas Fejes and Erik Nylander investigate how pluralistic the research field on adult education is. They do so with an analysis of the dominating bibliometrical trends observed in three leading academic journals researching the field of adult education, during the period of 2005-2012. The analysis adopts a two-step procedure: firstly, a map is made of the content of the top-cited contributions in terms of theoretical and methodological perspectives, common research themes and ways to construct the object, i.e. the *what* and *how* of the most cited articles. Secondly, the empirical account of *who* publishes in the adult education research field is presented. The findings show that the most cited articles tend towards

homogeneity with regard to the geographical distribution of the contributions, as well as to the research methods adopted. At the same time, the citation pattern shows that both early career researchers and established researchers are represented in the sample. The findings raise important questions regarding the openness of the established networks that give direction to the content of the journals, both regarding the themes and the methodologies. Is the emergence of new knowledge enabled or disabled by the dominant paradigms that inspire the research in the field of adult education?

In the second contribution, the Canada based scholars Kjell Rubenson and Maren Elfert explore the increasingly fragmented map of adult education research. They examine how the configuration of adult education research has been evolving, particularly over the last decade. Their analysis draws on a two-pronged approach: a reading of four seminal articles written by adult education scholars who have conducted bibliometric analyses of selected adult education journals; as well as their own review of 75 articles, covering a one-year period (2012-2013), in five adult education journals that were chosen to provide a greater variety of the field of adult education in terms of their thematic orientation and geographical scope than has been the case in previous reviews. Their findings suggest that the field is facing two main challenges. First, the fragmentation of the map of the territory that was noticed at the end of the 1990s, has continued and seems to have intensified. Second, not only practitioners, but also the policy community voice their disappointment with adult education research, in combination with a disconnection between academic adult education research and policy-related research. The authors provide a couple of speculations as to the future map of adult education as a field of study and point to the danger of shifting the research agenda away from classical adult education concerns about democracy and social rights.

In the third contribution 'Adult Education Research between Field and Rhizome', Bernd Käßlinger from Germany, presents a bibliometrical analysis of conference programs of the European Society for the Research on the Education of Adults. The conferences analysed are the seven triennial conferences that have been organised from 1995 to 2013. The author investigates the papers presented at each conference with regard to research approach, research methodology, location of the presenters, the visibility of the scholars and the influence of international agencies. This analysis presents an interesting and varied insight in the orientations and geographical distribution of the contributions to the conferences. The findings relate to the participation and representation; to the geographical distribution of the contributions to the conferences; to the influences of international agencies such as OECD and UNESCO on the policy directions discussed in the papers; to the prominence of particular authors in the theoretical positioning of the contributions; and to the distribution of research methodologies in the researched documents. The findings result into the major conclusion that, at the occasion of the triennial conferences, the adult education research cannot be perceived as a 'field', or a clearly established area, but rather as a 'rhizome' that is characterized by diversity and fluidity.

Participation in adult education and the professionalization of trainer-consultants

The Danish scholar Sissel Kondrup, in the fourth contribution to the thematic issue, deals with the much researched issue of participation in the provision of adult education, particularly with regard to people working in unskilled jobs. In her research she confirms the often repeated finding that people working in unskilled jobs participate in adult education less frequently than other groups, and that they are more reluctant to participate, since they have an instrumental orientation towards education. The

traditional interpretation of these findings is that the motives for non-participation are formed by specific cultures, value contexts or habitual dispositions. However, such interpretations tend to underestimate how these motives or orientations are produced and reproduced through a continuing experience process conditioned by people's ongoing engagement in specific historical work practices. In response to this, the author suggests to pay closer attention to peoples' specific work lives in order to comprehend why people working in unskilled jobs position themselves less likely than other groups as educable subjects. The author concludes that biographical research, related to the working-lives of people in unskilled jobs and to their attitudes vis-à-vis adult education, may improve the understanding of their non-participation and hence inspire efforts to include them.

In the final cartography paper 'Core activities and career pathways of independent trainers-consultants in France', the France based authors Laurence Bonnafous, Thierry Ardouin and Patrick Gravé, present in the first place an overview of the developments of Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) in France and the way independent professional trainers-consultants are organised in trade unions, and secondly, the initiatives of these organisations and their individual members to improve the recognition of the CVET-trainers as an autonomous, qualified professional group. The data are collected by means of document analysis, action research in the context of the trade unions, and questionnaires for individual trainers. The authors come to the conclusion that the group of researched independent trainers-consultants cannot be yet regarded as a profession. They thereby identify three lines of tension that could be taken as a point of departure for future initiatives to build a sustainable professionalization. The first line of tension concerns the difficulty of identifying a "core occupation" from which essential high level knowledge could be analysed and promoted. The second line of tension occurs at the level of professional ethics. It is related to, on the one hand the educational 'concern for the other', and on the other hand the necessity for the trainers-consultants to survive in a market driven context. Finally the third line relates to the tension between individual strategies of the trainers consultants, often in competition with each other, and more collective actions to increase the public recognition of the profession.

Open paper

The sixth paper in this issue, which is also the first open paper, is by Juan Carlos Pita. It presents research on the relationship between social background and the way arts students succeed or fail to realize their vocational ambitions. The contribution is based on previous research dedicated to the life paths of art school graduates whose empirical data consisted of 13 autobiographical interviews. It cuts these paths into biographical periods and attempts to throw light on the relationships they have between each other. This contribution starts from an observation: in spite of candidates being admitted to an art school and obtaining the same degree, their artistic vocations take several different directions and are highly polarized in terms of social origins. This article brings out this dichotomy through the concept of temporal form of causality. It highlights biographical logics that determine the achievement of the artistic project by articulating archaeological and procedural analysis of the biographies, and it points out a certain number of social gravities that find their origin in the social space and that become significant over the life paths.

The final paper in this issue is also an open paper. The two authors, located in Belgium, Delphine Resteigne and Peter Reyskens, provide a mainly theoretical contribution that discusses the limitations of the traditional views on intercultural

training/education and explores an alternative perspective. The authors raise the question how to understand cultural awareness training, if dealing with cultural diversity is not depending on individual competences but rather on the interaction between people on the ground. They take three steps to discuss this point. In a first step they consider the challenge of cultural diversity for military organizations. The second step consists of a reflection on the notion of intercultural competences and the idea that intercultural competences can be acquired by individuals. In the third step they develop an alternative understanding of the preparation for intercultural interaction, based on Sennett's distinction between practicing and rehearsing. In spite of the fact that the paper is mainly theoretical, it could have lots of practical relevance for the military and for wider contexts of adult education and training.

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