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Editorial: Non-traditional participants in adult education and learning

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Adult education has historically emerged from an eclectic set of practices, most of which are linked to a wide range of social movements and popular education trends, as we can see, for example, in Canário (2007). This commitment to social change and to the struggles of the people that we can observe, not just in Europe but also in the different continents, makes part of its historical background. In a sense, this means that adult education concerns and the importance given to learning in this context have been focused, not on school or formal education settings, but on a variety of groups of adult learners/ participants in social movements and learning experiences. Historical paradigmatic inspirations were of course diverse. Whilst pragmatism was and is clearly an American tradition (Finger & Asún, 2003) in other parts of the world, in Europe Marxism or Humanism were stronger in their influence over adult education theory and practice building.

From the historical perspective Adult Education have mainly been shaped and formed by social practices, including the institutionalization. The societal development produces needs for organized learning as also the adult education activities conducted by social movements. This analysis claims that the nature of non-traditional participant is also socially and contextually constructed (Olesen, 2010).

When lifelong education was the focus for theory and practice in the discipline of adult education, there was the tendency to emphasize its humanistic dimensions. These were understood as relevant in a multiplicity of contexts beyond school (the workplace, family and civic life, etc.). Adult education and learning could be seen not only as an instrument to better prepare workers for productive roles in the economy, but also as a pathway towards ‘conscientization’ (Freire, 1987:1997), social change and emancipation (Gelpi, 1990). In a way, critical educators like Paulo Freire, Ettore Gelpi or Ivan Illich took lifelong education to its extreme. The sustained connections of adult education with social movements allowed forms of action, theory and research for liberation and social change. In this way adult education could reach non-traditional groups and populations.

Transitions of the focus of the discipline from education to learning, and from lifelong education to lifelong learning brought new meanings, new challenges and new forms of questioning. Some authors defended open versions of lifelong learning, centred on learning (not teaching) and contributing to citizenship and democracy. Recent decades have witnessed also the appearance of narrower versions of lifelong learning,

reducing it to a simplified views of human capital; reducing learning to vocational training, introducing concepts of social competency based on individual responsibility (Lima, 2004), and emphasizing adult education as a function of (labour) market relations. Field (2001), for example, states that lifelong learning not only reproduces existing inequalities, it potentially also creates and legitimates new ones. These transitions have diversified the discipline and have multiplied the meanings of adult education, including a focus on the education and learning of adults who traditionally do participate.

Adult education as a discipline today emerges from past and current influences and operates in diverse contexts around the world. Meanings are sometimes contradictory, but all carry legitimacy. This creates an eclectic field of research, theory and practice, including different philosophies, principles, or models of action. Against this backdrop, turning our attention again to non-traditional participants is an important endeavour.

Some basic questions about such students and participants should be revisited. Who participates in education and learning as adults? And, who are the ones we fail to engage? In many countries throughout the world, it is possible to identify who participants in education as adults are, despite the fact that it is impossible to typify them. Quite often participants are middle-class white learners, less than 40 years old with a good educational background, who know at least one language apart from the mother tongue, who have some experience in information and communication technologies, and so on. In some countries, they are mainly male, in others predominantly female. Looking at the question of who they are from the other side of the mirror—who are the ones not participating—sheds light on the assumptions. Are we focussing attention in research, theory and practice on those groups or populations who “need us most”? Should ‘adult education’ preferentially target those who are being left outside the modern influence of systems of knowledge and learning—the most deprived, fragile or excluded individuals and groups in society? Years ago, maybe this could be considered an important focus. What about today? In some contexts, where education takes place, we fail to understand the immediate advantage for those adults who do participate.

It is important to consider that institutions, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations or other associations have their institutional policy, culture and interests. In the same line of reasoning, a wide range of professionals (whether adult educators or not) find their jobs in those institutions and have their own interests as workers and citizens. While we assume these interests do coincide, this in fact might not be the case. In short, a second assumption, incorporating all those who engage in education and learning as adults, prompts us to ask, simply, whose interests are being pursued through action?

Non-traditional participants are quite often characterized through their membership of scattered, non-unified and non-homogenous groups. In higher education the non-traditional students are those minorities whose participation is constrained by structural factors - mature students, working-class, cultural minorities or gender minorities (Finnegan, Merrill & Thunborg, 2014). Older citizens or immigrant populations are almost by definition either non- or non-traditional participants in learning. Literacy studies call our attention to non- participants whose rights as citizens are severely constrained and who can be encouraged to participate. In most social contexts, there are non- participants who, for one reason or another, become less visible as their voices are unheard. It seems therefore reasonable to suggest that a significant number of researchers focus on non-traditional participants. However, the nature of education and learning processes, the philosophic principles beneath the action, etc., are not

indifferent. Is it valid to assume that adult education with a focus on non-participants or non-traditional participants takes into account the improvement of participants' lives, or the emancipation of groups? Or, is this today a false assumption? Is the (scientific) discipline of adult education focussed on change?

Although it is of course impossible to answer all those questions in such a modest contribution—the present thematic issue—some researchers forwarded very interesting perspectives. Ted Fleming reclaims the emancipatory potential of adult education and learning on the basis of Honneth's theoretical and empirical analysis of the struggle for recognition. He thereby connects to Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, built on the learning experiences of non-traditional adult students returning to education, and on the critical theory of Habermas. This link between transformation theory and Honneth's work, who recently has advanced ideas about identity development and freedom, allows for an updating of the gaps in transformation theory – particularly in connection with an inadequate understanding of the social dimension of learning. A new understanding of 'disorienting dilemma' as a struggle for recognition is suggested. This paper expands our understanding of the emancipatory intent of transformative learning. EU funded empirical research supports this new iteration of the adult learning theory. Implications are drawn for the teaching of non-traditional students in adult and higher education.

Viktor Vesterberg has analysed learning practices in labour market projects co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) targeting unemployed Roma in Sweden. The empirical material consists of 18 project descriptions from ESF projects, as well as national and European policy documents concerned with the inclusion of the Roma in contemporary Europe. The contemporary empirical material is analysed in relation to a government report from 1956 concerning the 'Roma issue' in Sweden. The analytical perspective of the study is governmentality, and the analysis focuses on different kinds of problematizations and the discursive positioning of the Roma subjects. One of the main findings is that unemployed Roma are situated in various discourses of misery and constructed as being in need of reshaping their subjectivities in order to become educable as well as employable.

Pauliina Alenius has focused on migrants as non-traditional learners while studying their civic participation. The aim of the article is to examine the informal learning processes of migrants particularly in relation to their forms of social engagement in associations, informal groups and transnational networks in the Estonia-Finland space. The theoretical framework relates to the socio-cultural, situated learning tradition as well as transnational migration studies. The research data (98 interviews) were analysed following theory-guided content analysis. Diverse learning trajectories were identified and one as 'transnational brokers' conveying conceptions and practices between communities across national borders.

Henrique Fonseca and colleagues present another non-traditional group of learners. The authors want to understand the academic success of mature (non-traditional) students in Portugal. The increasing number and diversity of non-traditional participants who are now entering Higher Education Institutions (HEI) highlights the relevance of exploring mature students' academic success. The purpose of this study is to characterise mature students of two Portuguese HEI, and understand their academic success. The study focuses on results obtained through a case study, based on quantitative and qualitative data: questionnaires and focus groups, respectively. The authors discuss the influence of different variables (such as: age, gender, area of study, schooling level at the entrance to the university, family monthly income) on mature students' academic success, and also describe some obstacles they face and changes

they perceive when attending university. Results seem to demonstrate a similar tendency between data gathered in both HEI's. Some recommendations for HEI, based on the results, are presented in the final section of this article.

This part of our issue is closed by the article *Like a Rolling Stone. Non-traditional spaces of adult education* written by Emilio-Lucio-Villegas. The author describes adult education as the scientific discipline and field of social practices and explores the squeezing concept of adult education that provides a kind of identity to the field characterised by vagueness, diversity and the links to social justice. This diversity is also present when talking about the participants, spaces and teachers in adult education. The author stresses also the role of both teacher and learners as essential to define non-traditional spaces and non-traditional participants in adult education.

This issue also includes two open papers. The first, written by Kerry Harman, focused on learning in the workplace. Working within an assemblage analytic, this paper examines work–education intersections using the notion of learning reals. The learning real examined is learning as mastery and skills development. The concepts of embodiment and performativity guide the exploration. The paper draws on interview and observational data collected during a three-year research project exploring the everyday learning (of employees) in a post-secondary education institution in Australia. The project was an industry/university collaboration between a group of professional developers from the organisation and a group of workplace learning academics. The assemblages making up learning as mastery are traced through examining the enactment of this real by a group of trade teachers, one of the workgroups participating in the project.

The second open paper was written by Séamus Ó Tuama, who brings us a reflection around reflexive activation and its importance to the unemployed insertion in the labour market. This model of reflexive activation proposed by Séamus Ó Tuama draws on Schuller's three capitals (identity capital, human capital and social capital). The article concludes that education and training are key catalysts for capacity building to engage positively in the labour market. In view of getting back to work, the starting point for many workers seems to be identity capital. The journey further progresses through social capital in order to leverage human capital in the labour market. This article really helps us to understand how adult education can help both individuals and society in this context.

Finally, this thematic issue also includes six book reviews. The first one explores critically a theme which today concerns the scientific community, and simultaneously fits within RELA's agenda: Writing for peer reviewed journals. The remaining five book reviews are also very important to us. They bring us critical reviews on all the books edited by Sense representing ESREA research networks' contributions. Their importance is twofold: first, they are open access books, showing how ESREA tries to be coherent regarding the principles it defends. Second, more visibility is given to the scientific work produced within ESREA research networks. After all, those research networks are the backbone of ESREA.

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