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Editorial. RELAs 10-year anniversary: what have we accomplished?

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Editorial: RELAs 10-year anniversary: What have we accomplished?

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Introduction

The first issue of RELA was published in 2010, so with this issue we enter the 10-year anniversary. In this editorial, we will firstly elaborate on what we as editors find that RELA has accomplished. Secondly, we introduce changes that are taking place while entering 2019, and lastly, we introduce the papers which are included in this issue.

What has RELA accomplished?

RELA was created with a mission to complement journals already available in the field, by on the one hand, providing a space for critical debates on issues at stake for adult education in Europe and beyond, and on the other hand, provide a space that encourages

publication by authors from countries in Europe who do not appear as frequent in the journals that were already available in the English language. As we argued in the first editorial of RELA (Fejes & Salling Olesen, 2010, p. 12).

The most important reason for launching RELA, however, and the reason why there is a need for this kind of journal, is related to the geographical and cultural bias of those international journals already available. They are all based in, mainly publish articles from and have their main readership in the Anglophone world. This is no surprise. English has become the lingua franca of academic discussions and debates today, and this means that the publishing industry in the UK, the Commonwealth and North America has expanded from local to global, or has taken the challenge to provide publishing channels for the emerging global community. Something reinforced by governments and university boards across many countries, where performance appraisals are based on the number of publications, and to some extent citations, in “international” academic peer-review journals. We can observe a situation where the Anglophone communities dominate while all the other local and national academic communities and the practical and cultural experience they refer to, are becoming more and more marginal. In the light of this, we felt there was a need for a truly international, European journal, which actively embraces non-Anglophone (as well as Anglophone) contributions, and thereby broadens the academic discussion in the field.

Empirical research has indicated that there is a great over representation of authors from the UK, US, Australia and Canada in the adult education and learning journals that publish in English, in terms of authorship as well as in terms of citations (see e.g. Fejes & Nylander, 2019; Nylander, Österlund & Fejes, 2018). As Fejes and Nylander (2014) illustrate, authors from the four mentioned countries have authored 66% of all articles published in four of the main adult education journals during a ten-year period. At the same time, authors from these countries represent 88% of all citations in all articles published in these journals during the same period of time. As recently argued in a paper on ‘decolonizing writing in academic journals’ (Trahar, Juntrasook, Burford, von Kotze & Wildemeersch, 2019), the effect of such tendencies can be considered, in line with de Sousa Santos (2016), as a kind of epistemicide, or the annulling of a wide variety of forms of knowledge. These combined developments tend to install ‘a hegemony that spreads not through coercion but by using culture to disseminate a particular worldview, until its premises, which are inevitably partial and contingent, appear natural, obvious and incontestable’ (Bennett, 2013, p. 188).

We as editors of RELA believe that this imbalance is problematic as it ignores much research in the field that would be beneficial for furthering and nuancing the debates going on in the English-speaking journals. Thus, we have worked actively to attract contributions from countries where English is not the first language. Part of such a strategy has been to have an open access language policy. On the one hand, we allow submissions in languages that any of the seven editors can handle. Such a paper is reviewed in the original language, and if accepted, authors need to provide a translated version that is further checked by editors in order not to lose meaning as compared to the original accepted manuscript. On the other hand, we do not reject papers due to minor flaws in English, although we require that accepted manuscripts are professionally edited (responsibility of authors) for language before publication. Finally, the ability to attract authors from various countries and languages also rests in ESREA dynamics, namely in the fact that its twelve networks meet regularly in a vast number of countries, and the networks convenors disseminate the journal themselves widely.

With such a policy, encouraging a wider diversity in what is being published, we look back here at the result. In accordance to the approach taken by Fejes and Nylander

(2014) we have focused on the geographical locations of the first authors in all published articles (excluding editorials and book reviews) in RELA since 2009 and up until this issue. In total there have been 108 articles published.

Table 1: Number of articles published in RELA 2009-2019 (issue 1) with first author located in a specific country

Country	Articles	Country	Articles
Germany	17	Poland	3
UK	15	Australia	2
Canada	11	Austria	2
Sweden	10	Slovenia	2
Portugal	7	Netherlands	2
Denmark	5	USA	2
Belgium	5	Norway	1
Italy	4	Switzerland	1
Spain	4	Greece	1
France	4	Estonia	1
Finland	4	South Africa	1
Ireland	3	Brasil	1

In table 1 we can firstly see how there is a quite wide distribution of first authors, representing 24 countries, mainly in Europe. Secondly, we can see how Germany represents the highest share of all published articles (16%), closely followed by the UK (14%). If adding up all articles by authors located in the UK, US, Canada and Australia these four countries represent 28% of all published articles. This is substantially different as compared to the result provided by Fejes and Nylander (2014). In their sample, these four countries represented 66% of all published articles. So, in terms of authorship, RELA seems to have come quite far, even though an imbalance still exists.

There is however, also an imbalance in terms of representation from different parts of Europe. Germany is dominating, as well as the Nordic countries. The latter group of countries are represented by 20 articles (18,5%). There is also representation from the “south” (Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece). These countries together are represented by 15% of all articles published. However, Portugal stands for half of these articles. Representation of authors from Eastern Europe is however, low. Authors from Poland are represented as well as Estonia. But no authors located in, for example, Hungary, Bulgaria or Romania. Even though France is represented by 2 papers, this is however, low if considering the size of the country and the academic community in adult education located there. In sum, there is still much to do for RELA in terms of attracting submissions and publishing papers from different parts of Europe and beyond.

Introducing changes

Entering 2019, RELA has introduced a few changes. Firstly, RELA will as of this year, start publishing three issues per year. Publication dates are mid-February, mid-June and mid-October. In order to further broaden the work of RELA, and thus potentially the

inflow of articles, one issue per year is expected to be co-edited together with conveners of one of the RELA networks. Each call for papers will address a key topic in adult education in Europe today, and be distributed openly and widely.

The second change is that we have, replaced the advisory board with a board of consulting editors. These have been appointed among researchers who have, by acting as reviewers for RELA, made important contributions through the years. The board of consulting editors will be reviewed every three years.

A third, and final change, has been that we have closed the book review section. This is due to our ambition to be whole heartedly focused on the work to attract, review and publish research articles of high quality from across Europe and beyond.

The papers

This open issue of RELA includes six articles. In the first article, Malgorzata Zielinka from Poland reflects on the learning experiences of Polish migrants in Iceland. The author has been a migrant in that country herself and on the basis of autobiographical notes and the data collected in extensive, qualitative interviews with compatriots in the country of arrival, she interestingly pictures how the (non-)learning took place. Theoretically speaking, the author draws on notions of critical pedagogy of place, geographical theory of place and translocal learning. In her findings, the author emphasizes that for the Polish migrants in Iceland, learning to engage in the culture of the country of arrival is not only an individual process. It also has an important collective dimension. Through these dialectics of individual and collective learning, migrants changed the concept of self, developed emotional response patterns and questioned stereotypes. They said that they had become more open to other people, they changed their pre-conceived notions about homosexuals, foreigners or people of different race.

In the second article, Lourdes Jiménez-Taracido, Ana Isabel Manzanal Martínez and Daniela Baridón Chauvie from Spain present an empirical study about the relationship between metacognitive skills use during reading and the reading comprehension improvement. The sample was constituted by 143 adult students from secondary education. The results showed that reading competences were lower than expected, with significant differences between courses and average use of metacognitive strategies, influenced by gender and age. A significant, linear and low-moderate degree relationship was found between two of the metacognitive strategies under evaluation. The authors, in consequence, built a predictive model where age, course, use of problem-solving strategies, and support reading strategies are predictive variables regarding reading skills. This study allowed the authors to recommend changes regarding adult teaching and learning in Spain.

The third article is authored by Chiara Biasin from Italy and Karen Evans from the UK. The reader is here offered an interesting comparative study of women aged fifty in the UK and Italy and focuses on the role of agency, identity and learning at turning point moments in the women's lives. The authors have chosen the age of fifty as a point in the women's lives as an appropriate time and age when they can reflect back upon their past learning and life experiences and the transitions they have experienced in their lives within the context of relational, cultural and institutional aspects. Methodologically and theoretically the study draws on Narrative Learning Theory in order to gain a rich insight into the women's lives and stories. In analysing the narratives four 'profile combinations' are identified which apply to both the UK and Italian women: Contained; Reactive; Testing; and Consciously Reflective. The four different 'profile combinations' are

explored in relation to how the women are able to use their agency to shape and change their identity through learning at critical turning point moments in their lives. While some similarities are identified between the UK and Italian women, such as gender inequality in patriarchal societies differences were also recognised in the way that the women used their agency in relation to learning - both formal and informal. The narratives also reveal that using agency in times of transition and turning points can facilitate a learning experience which enables women to move their lives forward while for some it may limit them.

In the fourth article, Elisabeth Hofmann from France takes us to two unique feminist movements in France which challenge, through feminist activism, male dominance and sexism in society. The first activist group – La Barbe (beard) confronts male domination in private and public decision-making institutions and key public events which address primarily political and financial issues by storming meetings wearing a false ‘barbe’ and interrupting the meetings by making speeches, issuing leaflets and videoing the proceedings. The second activist group – Femen, is a radical women’s group, based in Paris, but originally from the Ukraine, who organise topless protests against sexism, sex tourism, religious institutions and other key issues. The article discusses how participation in such movements has a transformational effect on participants by engaging them in informal learning which has the potential to be empowering. Both activist groups critique gender inequalities in society by focusing on different aspects and acting in diverse ways. The author argues that the contrasting ‘imaged performance’ of the two groups of one group choosing to use beards and the other exposing their breasts empowers the two groups of women. The article argues that the transformative learning which results from participation in either La Barbe or Femen are experienced in different ways arguing that the more aggressive approach used by Femen and its use of training courses leads to a more transformative learning experience than participation in La Barbe.

In the fifth article, by Catarina Sales Oliveira, Alcides Monteiro and Sílvia Pinto Ferreira from Portugal, the core premise is ‘can theatre raise consciousness and empowerment in the context of gender equality’ through the use of Empowerment Labs in Portugal by focusing on two groups of young women: university students and unemployed women. The project is firmly based in adult education but with a feminist focus. The project drew on the pedagogical work of Paulo Freire, Peter Jarvis, Jack Mezirow and Leona English. The aim of the project was to raise critical awareness through theatre and encourage both personal and social engagement with a focus on the labour market. To empower young women the use of performance arts and social intervention were employed through applied theatre workshops. For the author the application of applied theatre allows ‘for the conditions for this fruitful but delicate combination biographical and the dialogical dimensions of transformation and consciousness-raising of different actors’. The aim was to allow and enable the voices of individuals and communities who are underrepresented to be heard. Methodologically the Empowerment Labs combined action research with social intervention. Such an approach involves regular commitment from participants and this was recognised as a constraint as some did not always attend. The author argues that the experience of participating in an Empowerment Lab facilitates critical consciousness and reflexivity through the exercises involved in participating in an applied theatre. While recognising the power of applied theatre to transform women’s lives the author also recognises that the concept of empowerment needs to be looked at from a critical perspective.

In sixth and final article, Inga Specht and Franziska Stodolka from Germany, draw on a program analysis approach analysing 709 program offerings to adults at museums in five cities in Germany. Focus is directed towards determining and differentiating between

different participation pathways to cultural education. Participation portals, i.e. pathways for participation in cultural education, act as starting point for their analysis which results in four main categories: systematic-receptive; systematic-receptive AND autonomous-creative; autonomous-creative; empathetic-communicative; and one undecided.

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