



Thematic issue: Marketization and commodification of adult education

Submission deadline: November 30, 2015

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Marketization of education is a global phenomenon (Ball, 2007; Burch, 2009) and has also gained increased research interest during the last three decades, not least in terms of research on school choice and its consequences (Lundahl et al., 2014). Marketization connects back to the emergence of neo-liberalism in the 70s and 80s, an ideology which seeks to implement basic market economic principles in all areas of social life. Many educational scholars have analysed the ways neoliberalism effect education policies and practices (e.g. Henry Giroux, Stephen Ball). Neo-liberal marketization presumes a commodification of education and training provision, meaning that education needs to be organized according to the principles of supply and demand of the market economy. This development goes hand in hand with the introduction of the New Public Management discourse, which includes the application of market mechanisms in the public sector.

Within the literature on adult education many conceptual contributions, as well as policy analyses, raise concerns about how neoliberalism reshapes policies and practices in adult education (e.g. Barros, 2012; Fejes, 2006; Finnegan, 2008; Griffin, 1999; Martin, 2008; Milana, 2012; Rubenson, 2004). Some of these are more of an empirical character, focusing in detail on how policy changes operate, while others are more political, in terms of arguing for resistance and changes to the present state of being. However, when searching for empirical contributions on how marketization and commodification take shape in specific geographical locations, or for questions about the consequences of marketization and commodification on practices of adult education, there is not much to be found (in the English speaking literature). Most of the studies identified focus on higher education, and only a few on adult education (cf. Fejes et al., 2015).

Obviously marketization has effects on provision and participation but it might not be the same in different contexts – and it might also have ambiguous effects in each case. In most cases marketization exposes established institutions to competition from alternative programs and makes them (more) dependent on an articulated demand. In many cases this is combined with the withdrawal of subsidies and leaving activities to be funded by potential participants, their employers, or other agencies. But marketization may also mean the introduction of new services or well known services to new users. Marketization raises especially two types of questions:

One type is: How does the market based production and distribution influence the very service (the education provision) itself? Does it lead to standardization and/or to differentiated services? Does it make use of new technologies and formats of provision? Does it enable quality improvement and development of programs? Does



it introduce new power relations between school leaders and teachers/adult educators, teachers and students, as well as between teachers and teachers? Another type of questions is related to the access and availability of educational resources. Does it facilitate the access for new users, broader dissemination – e.g. international provision? Does it exclude minority groups or substantially reduce their access to education? Do the changes in funding restrict users from access, or introduce new power relations around participation, e.g. between employers and employees?

It is possible to indicate such general dimensions of marketization, but we think that the forms and effects are dependent on local/national institutions, education traditions, social and cultural organisations etc. (Salling Olesen, 2014). For this reason the lack of empirical contributions is problematic. Researchers engaged in the field in different location should be able to identify a range of practices where marketization and commodification takes hold with specific consequences. Does marketization have the same and/or different consequences in traditional social democratic welfare states as, let's say e.g. traditional Christian democratic welfare states or liberal welfare states (cf. Esping-Andersen, 1990)?

Even though many consequences of the marketization for our daily lives and activities in the field, may be deemed negative or at least problematic, limiting the critique to conceptual papers and arguments does not provide a sufficient basis for a more elaborate and nuanced discussion on the topic. Thus, for this thematic issue we invite papers that critically analyse and problematise how marketization and/or commodification takes shape within adult education practices in diverse geographical locations and educational sectors, as well as papers that focus on what the consequences of marketization are on policies and practices of adult education.

Submissions should be sent to andreas.fejes@liu.se and hso@ruc.dk no later than November 30, 2015, formatted according to the instructions for authors available at www.rela.ep.liu.se.

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