Thematic issue of RELA:

Cartographies of research on adult education and learning

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Lead editors for this issue: Andreas Fejes, Katherine Nicoll, Danny Wildemeersch

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 in reflexive engagement, understanding what is going on in the field, and regarding some of 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; a historical emphasis on Anglophone authors in the publication of research and describing the field (see e.g. Larsson, 2010) 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 increased (cf. Taylor, 2001; Fejes & Nylander, 2013). Critical approaches - socio-cultural perspectives, critical pedagogy, and post-structural theorisations - currently dominate (cf. Fejes & Nicoll, 2013). Such observations have, we feel, crucially supported analytic discussions over the reasons for 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, 2013). 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, 2011). Furthermore, there has been a shift from male to female dominance (cf. Taylor, 2011). These are only a few observations illustrated through such analyses - there are numerous others 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 research contexts (other than the Anglophone) and they focus on journal publications only.

Another strand of relevant literature are 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 later taken up by Knowles (1970) in an 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 understanding of the field as it is shaped in contemporary times. It is important to observe in this respect is that the field of research is continuously undergoing reconstruction in differing contexts and might thus go under other labels or other names; social pedagogical and andragogical research, research on social work or community education, human resource development and vocational education and training (when these relate to adults). We hope these cartographies will cover a wide range of such contexts and approaches to analysis, focusing on a range of national, regional and/or international geo-political or field specific domains. Our hope is that this will provide a ground for scientific reflexivity about the field, where it stands today and how it is shaped and influenced.

Papers are welcome relating to one or more of the following themes, but not exclusively limited to them:

- forms of analysis (bibliometric, content, citation, critical etc.)
- conceptual papers
- historical analyses of the development of the “field”
- novel approaches to cartography research related to (adult) education and learning
- national, regional or international geo-political or field specific domains.

Papers from different national, regional or international geographical locations, analysing different kinds of empirical material and drawing on different kinds of theories and methods are particularly sought.

Submissions should be sent no later than June 15, 2014, by e-mail, to andreas.fejes@liu.se, katherine.nicoll@stir.ac.uk, and danny.wildemeersch@ppw.kuleuven.be formatted according to the instructions for authors available at www.rela.ep.liu.se

References


