



## **Thematic issue of RELA: Adult Education and the Aesthetic Experience**

Submission deadline: November 1, 2018

**Lead editors for this issue: Danny Wildemeersch & Wolfgang Jütte**

---

### **Aesthetics: a broad understanding**

Over the last years the interest in the relationship between education and aesthetics has remarkably increased, both in theory and in practice. One could even argue that to a certain extent there is an 'aesthetic turn' in the way educational practices are conceived. In connection with this increased attention, the editors of RELA want to stimulate the reflection and dialogue on how aesthetics plays a role both in theory and in practices of adult education and learning. The concept of aesthetics is often connected with art practices. We are interested in that particular orientation. However, we want in the first place to conceive of aesthetics in a broader sense. We are thereby inspired by Nikolas Kompridis (2014, p. XVI) for whom "aesthetic" or "aesthetics" is 'much more than a specialized inquiry into the nature of art, artworks or beauty, grounded in a sensuous, usually non-cognitive, mode of perception'. Aesthetic(s) in his view is something much wider in scope: 'it is about what we are able to see and hear and what we are unable to see and hear' (ibid. p. XVIII). This approach is very much inspired by Jacques Rancière who understands aesthetics as 'the distribution of the sensible'. To him, aesthetics refers to the 'order of the sensible', which is about the 'specific distribution of space and time, of the visible and the invisible, that create specific forms of "commonsense", regardless of the specific message such-and-such an act intends' (Rancière, 2010, p. 141). Hence, in this view, politics, as well as education and arts are aesthetic because they relate to (the questioning of) the order of 'what makes sense'. And therefore, changes in aesthetic regimes often are signals or symptoms of changes in the way we understand the social, cultural and political order (see also: Sitzia, 2018).

In a more concrete way, Paul Mecheril (2015) argues that 'cultural-aesthetic education' (kulturell-ästhetische Bildung) can neither be restricted to the knowledge of artworks, concerts and theatre plays, nor to the qualities of perception capacities. It rather relates to the processes through which aesthetic experiences are connected with overall conditions in which we live, including the question what is valuable to strive for'. Another source of inspiration of such broad approach to aesthetics is John Dewey who, when researching the meaning of art in human action, emphasizes not so much the outcome of artistic practices, but rather stresses the broad sensorial experiences that captivate the attention of human beings. 'In order to *understand* the esthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with the raw: in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens: the sights that hold the crowd – the fire-engine rushing by; the machines excavating enormous holes in the earth, the human-fly climbing the steeple-side; the men perched high in air on girders, throwing and catching red-hot bolts (Dewey, 1934, p. 4-5)'.

### **Approaches to aesthetics in (adult) education**

We see these broad ways of understanding ‘aesthetics’ also reflected in recent work on education in general and adult education in particular. Various authors signal the limitations of a cognitivist understanding of educational practices. They claim that education and learning indeed include all senses such as seeing, feeling, tasting and touching, rather than just thinking, memorizing and understanding. Therefore, one could claim that education and learning are *bodily* experiences. For Gert Biesta (2017), education is the work of the head, of the hands and of the heart. It is about the way we engage in and with the world with all our senses. In a similar way, Richard Siegesmund (2013, p. 303) conceives of aesthetic education as a playful activity, ‘an open and fluid imagining with delight as a possible outcome but can never be a goal’. Hence, such activity is purposeless. In the same vein, Gayatri Spivak (2012) emphasizes that aesthetics is ‘a curriculum of ab-use’; or an activity that is deviant to utility.

Other authors, particularly the ones that relate to adult education emphasize the critical function of aesthetic education. Anne Harris (2014) analyses how economy and industry nowadays instrumentalize creativity in view of increased profit-making. In response, she develops an argument for a new ‘aesthetic imaginery’ in diverse educational contexts and art practices. Such imaginery is the result of slowing down the educational process. ‘Slowing down doesn’t in itself promise a better kind of education, or an increased opportunity for creative exploration and productive risk-taking, but it sets the condition for doing so’ (Harris, 2014, p. 71). Other authors, like Jane McDonnell (2014) search to re-imagine the significance of art in the relationship between democracy and education. Still other authors like Ana Zarrelli and Elizabeth Tisdell (2016) conceive of aesthetic education as a tool to represent the ethical dimension in critical public pedagogy.

### **Concrete art experiences in adult education**

In line with these varied orientations vis-à-vis aesthetics in general and aesthetics in adult education, there are also concrete art experiences worth being presented and analyzed. Artistic practices have long been popular in diverse forms of adult education. Raymond Williams (1989) has long been a concrete source of inspiration to aesthetic approaches in adult workers’ education in the UK. Other orientations relate to the use of arts in literacy education. Paulo Freire (1972) was one of the first researchers in that field to experiment with images and drawings to support processes of ‘reading the word and the world’ with landworkers in Latin-America. Still today similar approaches are practiced in a wide variety of educational initiatives. In line with Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal developed his Theatre of the Oppressed (1975). There are many indications that his methods are still very much alive in adult education today. Also in community arts a broad mixture of aesthetic approaches are in use, such as theatre workshops, community walks, street art, neighbourhood walking and mapping, but increasingly also the use of social media and practices of blogging (Wildemeersch & Von Kotze, 2014; Gouthro, 2018; Right, 2018). Also museum education is increasingly moving beyond traditional methods such as guided tours by arts experts (Clover, Sanford & Johnson, 2018). Furthermore peace education makes use of mixed media (Medosch, Vater & Zwerger, 2014). And even in vocational education and training there are initiatives that introduce creative and expressive methods, other than the traditional ways to transfer knowledge and skills (Bennett, Reid & Petocz, 2013; Tamboukou, 2017).

### **An invitation to contribute**

RELA invites authors to contribute to this thematic issue on ‘adult education and the



aesthetic experience' with both theoretical and/or empirical contributions that refer to the above mentioned variety of approaches regarding aesthetic experiences in adult education and learning. We also very much welcome analysis of existing practices, on condition that they are subject of systematic scientific observation and interpretation. We suggest that they take following general research question as a basic orientation to their contribution:

*How can the aesthetic experiences inspire adult education theory and practice?*

More concretely, the contributions could cover historical, comparative and philosophical research or combinations thereof, case-studies, systematic observations of teaching and learning in arts practices, evidence of new aesthetic trends and perspectives in adult education, the aesthetic dimension of new media in adult education practices, etc..

Contributions are expected to be submitted by November the 1<sup>st</sup> 2018, to [danny.wildemeersch@kuleuven.be](mailto:danny.wildemeersch@kuleuven.be) and [wjuette@uni-bielefeld.de](mailto:wjuette@uni-bielefeld.de).

## References

- Bennett, D., Reid, A. & Petocz, P. (2014). Creative workers' views on cultural heritage and sustainability, *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 6(1), 1-13, DOI: [10.3402/jac.v6.24476](https://doi.org/10.3402/jac.v6.24476)
- Biesta, G. (2017). *Letting Art Teach. Art Education 'After' Joseph Beuys*. Arnhem: Artez.
- Clover, D., Sanford, K. & Johnson, K. (2018) Museum and gallery pedagogic strategies for change, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 37(1), 1-3, DOI: 10.1080/02601370.2017.1406547.
- Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as Experience*. New-York: Capricorn Books.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Gouthro, P. (2018). Creativity, the Arts and Transformative Learning. In: M. Milana, S. Webb, J. Holford, R. Waller & P. Jarvis, *The Palgrave International Handbook on Adult and Lifelong Learning*, pp. 1011-1026.
- Harris, A. (2014). *The Creative Turn. Toward an Aesthetic Imaginary*. Rotterdam: Sense.
- McDonnell, J. (2014). Reimagining the Role of Art in the Relationship between Democracy and Education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 46(1), pp.46-58.
- Mecheril, P. (2015). Kulturell-Ästhetische Bildung. Migrationspädagogische Anmerkungen. *Kulturelle Bildung Online*. Retrieved on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 2018 from: (<https://www.kubi-online.de>).
- Medosch, A., Vater, S. & Zwerger, I., eds (2014). "Ästhetische Erziehung" im Digital Zeitalter. *Magazin (Erwachsenbildung.at)*, 22.
- Kompridis, N. (2014). Turning and Returning: the aesthetic turn in political thought. In: N. Kompridis, ed., *The Aesthetic Turn in Political Thought*. London: Bloomsbury Academic (pp. XIV-XXXVII).



Rancière, J. (2010). *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. London: Continuum.

Right, R.R. (2018). Popular Culture, Adult Learning and Identity Development. In: M. Milana, S. Webb, J. Holford, R. Waller & P. Jarvis, *The Palgrave International Handbook on Adult and Lifelong Learning* (pp. 979-989).

Siegesmund, R. (2013). Art Education and Democratic Citizenry, *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, 32(3), 300-308.

Sitzia, E. (2018) The ignorant art museum: beyond meaning-making, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 37(1), 73-87, DOI: 10.1080/02601370.2017.1373710.

Spivak, G.C. (2012). *An Aesthetic Education in the Age of Globalisation*. Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press.

Tamboukou, M. (2017). *Women Workers' Education. Life Narratives and Politics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wildemeersch, D. & von Kotze, A. (2014). Multiple Interruptions: Creative Encounters in Public Art and Public Pedagogy, A North South Dialogue. *Studies in Art Education: A Journal of Issues and Research*, 55(4), 313-327.

Williams, R. (1989). *Culture*. London: Fontana.

Zorrilla, A. & Tisdell, E.J. (2016). Art as Critical Public Pedagogy. A Qualitative Study of Luis Camnitzer and his Conceptual Art. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 66(3), 273-291.