

**Thematic issue of RELA:
“The changing landscapes of literacies and adult education”**

Submission deadline: 17th May 2019

Lead editors for this issue:

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Literacy, numeracy and language learning have always had a central place in adult education theory and practice. Over the various historical moments and contexts, its meaning, uses and importance has been changing considerably. It is difficult therefore, to build a consistent and complete road map to literacies and adult education that takes into account every trend, theoretical approach and practical experience. However, it is important to consider the importance of Paulo Freire’s work that started in the early 1960s in Northeast Brazil (Freire, 1965). His work calls attention to educational-political processes as being central for adults to regain their voices as citizens in the fight against oppression (Freire, 1997). It seems that in a number of societies and particularly during the 60s and the 70s, literacy was key to social change and a matter of social justice. Literacy, therefore, provides us with a lens for understanding the world.

Literacies are without question inter-connected with a number of structural conditions and inequalities, including social class, gender, ethnicity and especially with lack of power so these issues are frequently analysed within literacies studies and its connections to social inclusion and exclusion. For example, women globally have been a key group who have been oppressed in relation to literacy, numeracy and language learning. Because literacies are complex, nations try to tackle them using a wide range of approaches or methods, precisely because of its basic importance, not only for citizens, but also for social, cultural and economic national systems. Literacies can be an integrating issue in public policies and a way of increasing social inclusion. Literacy studies, once strong in community adult education, have branched out to include new forms of literacies such as language literacy (with migrants), health literacy, digital literacy and workplace literacy.

There have also been, in the last decades, changing understandings of adult literacies. For example, functional approaches focus on the citizens’ uses of literacy and numeracy in every day-life activities. For some time such approaches seemed innovative and were linked, in many countries, with systems of recognition of prior learning. Other ways of conceptualizing literacies are derived from critical and social approaches that seek to locate learning in the context of wider structures of inequality. Fundamental to these approaches is the need for practitioners to distance themselves from the framing of literacy learning simply as an individual difficulty that derives from some current, or past, personal problem or circumstance. This is because viewing literacy, numeracy and language learning as a process of individuals acquiring skills, and adult literacies teaching as responding to individual need, can reinforce a deficit model of the learner and a remedial view of provision (see Tett, Hamilton and Crowther, 2012). New research and practice has also shown that it is more appropriate to talk about literacies as plural, rather than singular. This approach, known as the New Literacy Studies (as in Barton 2007; Street and Lefstein, 2008), has been at the forefront in undermining the discourse of deficit because it grounds literacies in real peoples’ lives and starts from the local, everyday experience of literacy in particular communities of practice. This means that there are different literacy practices in different domains of social life, such as education, religion, workplaces, families, community activities. These change over time and different literacies are supported and shaped by the institutions and social relationships that people are part of and do not

transfer easily across contexts. The new literacy studies dispenses with the idea that there is a single literacy that can be unproblematically taken for granted, rather we have to think in pluralistic terms about the variety of literacies that are used in different contexts in order to make literacies practices meaningful to people.

Social, economic, political and cultural changes in society have also been determining the emergence of different perspectives on literacies. Society's evolution, scientific and technological progresses, the increase of opportunities in education and a mass higher education system in many national contexts, for example, create new areas of human knowledge and implicate a reassessment of the very meanings of literacy. However, as Camilla Addey (2018) points out, there is the danger of a single story being told about literacy and numeracy as a result of international standardised tests such as the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), or the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP), a household assessment that measure literacy skills in developing countries. These assessments tell a particular story of literacy as numbers (see Hamilton et al, 2015) that can lead to narrow educational policies and incomplete learning practices.

These changing dynamics imply that there are many ways of conceptualising literacies so, in this special issue, we are interested in depicting today's landscapes of literacies and adult education. What are the major trends in the field, today? Are there new theoretical and practical approaches that deserve a closer look from the research community? Are "old" theories and practices still being used or becoming visible again, both in research and in public discourses? What is the relationship between lifelong learning and studies of literacy, numeracy or language learning today?

For this thematic issue we welcome conceptual, theoretical, policy, historical or review articles and articles based on empirical studies which may include the perspectives of adult students and/or adult educators. Deadline for submission is 17th May 2019. Papers should be submitted, formatted according to author guidelines available at www.rela.ep.liu.se, and sent to Barbara Merrill (Barbara.Merrill@warwick.ac.uk), Lyn Tett (L.Tett@hud.ac.uk) and António Fragoso (aalmeida@ualg.pt).

References

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