

Thematic issue of RELA:**Quality as a contested terrain in the education and learning of adults**

Submission deadline: 30th of October 2024

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In the landscape of education, quality has during the last decades emerged as a key concept and discourse. The same is the case within education and learning of adults, where the pursuit of lifelong learning stands as a cornerstone of EU as well as national policies. Such policies include ambitions that lifelong learning will support personal growth, active citizenship, and not the least professional enhancement that shapes people into employable citizens (see e.g. Fejes & Nylander, 2019). To reach such goals, there are constant calls for better quality. However, what quality is and how quality is shaped within adult education and learning practices is a rather unexplored field (Mufic, 2023).

With a shift towards a neoliberal notion of governing taking hold in Europe in the 1980s, governing has become decentralized. Public services, such as education, have across many countries become re-organised in logics similar to the business world, i.e. New Public Management. Within such governing logic, public services receive more freedom on how to approach and deliver their services to their 'customers', i.e. citizens. Such freedom is provided in combination with demand for greater accountability and auditing. Public services organizations thus must document and make visible in what way they deliver what is expected of them (see e.g. Dahler-Larsen, 2019). Such increase in documentation and auditing put the local level in a paradoxical situation where more and more time must be dedicated to documentation and administration rather than delivering the services they are expected to deliver with high quality (see e.g. Bergh, 2015; Bornemark, 2020).

With the emergence of New Public Management, quality has, Dahler-Larsen (2019, p. 2) argues, 'invaded the public space' and the standard way of thinking seems to be that the more quality evaluations, follow-ups, and audits, the better the quality (Skourdoumbis, 2019; Ozga et al., 2011). However, the quality concept is rather opaque, and what 'quality' really is, is often rather mystified (Blanco-Ramirez, 2015; Dahler-Larsen, 2019). Thus, quality is often reduced to mere metrics (Delaney, 2018) which easily ends up in overlooking local quality standards (Rudoe, 2020). This raises questions of what quality is or might be, how quality is measured and with what effects, and maybe even more importantly, if it can or should be measured at all.

When examining the historical roots of the concept, Egetenmeyer and K applinger (2011) argue that today's notion of quality emerged within industrial and economic contexts. In such environments, "quality" denoted conformity to the intended specifications rather than indicating excellence. Similarly, in educational contexts, the concept of quality, as noted by Egetenmeyer and K applinger (2011, p. 25), entails:

...the predominance of quality and management even within the educational debate is a good example of the increasing predominance of economic perspectives in the perception of a “market” of adult education nowadays. It outlines to a certain degree the failure of adult education to develop its terminology and to use quality management in an economic sense.

With New Public Management and its economic vocabulary invading the policy as well as practices of adult education and learning, mobilising specific notions of the concept of quality, it becomes important to scrutinise what kinds of mobilisations are put in place and what these do to adult education and learning practices and to those engaged within these practices.

For this thematic issue we invite papers that conceptual and/or empirically deal with issues pertaining to quality in relation to the education and learning of adults. Papers could concern any of the following topics (but not limited to):

- Critical scrutiny of discourses on quality in relation to the education and learning of adults
- Analyses of policy initiatives and governance structures promoting quality in the education and learning of adults at local, national, and international level
- Theoretical frameworks and conceptualisations of quality in the education and learning of adults
- Analyses of assessment methods and indicators of quality in practices of the education and learning of adults
- Analyses of quality assurance mechanisms and accreditation processes in institutions engaged in the education and learning of adults
- Analyses of processes of translation of the education and learning of adults into indicators

Papers should be submitted through the online system no later than 30th of October 2024.

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