

**Thematic issue of RELA:
Arts and adult education**

Submission deadline: 31st October 2025

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Although ubiquitous to community-based adult education, this century has ushered in a significant turn in the academic field of adult education towards arts-based teaching and research approaches – an entry into a realm of imagination, experimentation, creative co-learning, co-production, and artistic critique and possibility (Clover et al, 2022; Wildermesch, 2019). Central to the creative turn is the quest for a new imaginary of the past and the present, and for new ways of thinking, seeing, being, feeling, doing, and knowing the future.

Although arts-based education and research practices are not without challenges, they do offer avenues to maintain and expand the critical social purpose of our field. These range from helping people to navigate new identity terrains to providing a creative outlet or release from the everyday; from encouraging new knowledge about the past to disrupting problematic assumptions and traditions; from boosting and deepening solidarity and collective activism to seeing the unseen and hearing unheard to understand how they maintain relations of power and injustice (Butterwick & Roy, 2020; Clover et al, 2022; Yang & Lipson Lawrence, 2017).

As adult education has experienced a creative turn, contemporary art has simultaneously engaged with educational processes, creating spaces for creations and interventions that align with learning practices and an openness to the unknown. As early as 2008, Irit Rogoff, in her seminal text *Turning*, published in *e-flux*, anticipated what is now recognised as the educational turn in art. She cautioned against the futility of what she termed the perpetual lament over the bureaucratisation and homogenisation of education. As this educational turn has gained momentum over the past two decades, it has begun to shift in artistic practice towards pedagogical models, collective knowledge production, and learning as an artistic act in itself. It challenges traditional hierarchies of expertise and opens up new spaces for experimentation, where education becomes a creative generative process. Emerging trends in creative disciplines have challenged conventional notions of knowledge and its production. In creative practices, knowledge is increasingly understood as something that emerges through the processes of creation, mediation, and artistic experience, rather than being confined to a fixed final product (Sutherland & Acord, 2007). Thus, the arts are not merely a potential learning modality or methodology; they also have the power to reshape the epistemological foundations that underpin adult education architecture.

The intersections and entanglements of art and adult education compel us to question existing structures and to imagine and create new learning environments—ones that go beyond merely adjusting, recycling, or critiquing prevailing educational discourses

(Maksimović, 2025). Rather than reinforcing institutional frameworks, this turn invites us to rethink the very conditions under which learning takes place, positioning education as a critical and transformative practice within contemporary art. A special significance for adult education lies in various participatory artistic practices aimed at but also, in collaboration with community, as they foster creativity, social inclusion, lifelong learning and a sense of possibility for a more dignified future. In the realm of public art, visual artists from diverse backgrounds and perspectives have been creating works that resemble political and social activism, yet remain distinct through their aesthetic sensibility (Lacy, 1995). Public art serves as an intervention and a dynamic platform where artistic expression intersects with civic engagement, fostering dialogue and challenging societal norms in visually compelling ways - an aspect of immense relevance to adult education. As such, public strategies of engagement are part of artistic language (Lacy, 1995; Mouffe, 2008), but they also provide a rich and immersive adult learning environment.

Arts-based adult education and research take many forms including performative, visual and narrative. The purpose of this special issue of RELA is to provide a forum for adult educator practitioners and scholars to share their creative practice and provide insights into art-based approaches to adult education. We invite authors to explore how the arts and creative practices can be an integral part of adult education and lifelong learning in communities, workplaces, universities, colleges and other types of institutions; to explore the links between learning, creativity, the imagination and adult education and research and the role of arts in the social, cultural, gender and ecological change/justice context. We welcome papers which focus on employing arts-based research approaches and detail the successes and challenges of using imaginative, innovative methodologies in the context of adult learning. We also welcome explorations of art education and curatorial practices.

We wish to share empirical research, theorising from the literature, or adult education and learning narratives through art-based research. Articles will be grounded in discourses of adult education (i.e., popular education, social learning, community education, transformative learning, critical and feminist adult education, indigenous adult education, public pedagogies and so on). Papers could consider the use of the art in relation to imagination and creativity and modes of teaching, learning or research. Furthermore, they can examine how specific artistic practices integrate educational or research processes, making spaces for social and political engagement and critical reflection.

Papers should be submitted by 31st October 2025 via the RELA journal online system. If you have any queries about the Special Issue please contact Maja Maksimović (maksimovic.ma@gmail.com). The editors for this Special issue are Darlene Clover, Maja Maksimović and António Frago.

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