

**Thematic issue of RELA:  
Inclusion, adult education and social justice**

Submission deadline: 31<sup>th</sup> January 2023

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Policies and practices of inclusion in diverse fields in society have received increasing attention in recent years. Initially, the notion of inclusion was almost exclusively related to the (enhancement) of participation of disabled persons through educational initiatives. In recent decades however, the focus of inclusion policies and practices has systematically broadened, encompassing vulnerable and/or marginalised individuals and groups such as migrants, unemployed people, disabled students, people with literacy needs, people from disadvantaged communities and living in poverty, etc. The term social inclusion

has become a broad spectrum policy organizing and action concept that encompasses all forms of social exclusion and marginalization with a strong poverty-reduction and youth-unemployment focus (Peters & Besley, 2014, p. 108).

This widening of scope has been enhanced by the growing interest of international organizations such as UNESCO, OECD and the European Union, but also national governments, that have increasingly become worried about the persistent exclusion of large numbers of individuals and groups from diverse societal domains both in the Global North and South. Policies implemented were at first mainly of a welfare character. Later these policies were also enlarging their scope and have fostered a broader understanding of inclusion. In line with this, inclusion has now become part of the discourse of policies and practices such as education, social work, employment, sports and recreation and politics. It is connected to discourses on lifelong learning, social cohesion and integration, activation, widening participation, equality/equity, democracy and social justice. Initiatives of inclusion are often a response to processes of social exclusion that can be described as a rupturing of social bonds, which is

a process of declining participation, access, and solidarity. At the societal level, it reflects inadequate social cohesion or integration. At the individual level, it refers to the incapacity to participate in normatively expected social activities and to build meaningful social relations (Silver, 2007, p. 4419).

The increased concern for social inclusion also relates to the rise in Europe and beyond of extremist political parties that take advantage of the discontent of large groups of people who feel excluded from mainstream society.

Adult education has over the last decades been very active, since one of its major goals is to combat social exclusion and to support the participation of vulnerable individuals and groups in society. It has mostly done so from a strong social justice perspective, while understanding

exclusion/inclusion in accordance with transformations in the societal context causing deprivation and marginalization. Such approach to inclusion is not neutral, since it is based on a normative, predominantly humanistic, view on desired societal conditions (Schreiber-Barsch, 2017). Additionally, diverse strategies have been developed to combat social exclusion in the context of literacy education, language learning, workplace learning, integration courses for migrants, second chance learning, open universities, community education, employability initiatives, social work practices, teacher training, online learning and blended learning. These practices have been framed with the help of theoretical concepts and research methodologies such as validation of prior learning, biographical learning, inclusive learning spaces, participatory (action) research, transformative learning and critical pedagogy (Morrow & Torres, 1995).

There is a very rich literature on (social) inclusion in various disciplines of social research such as sociology, political sciences, psychology, law, pedagogy, and anthropology. The European Journal for Research on the Learning and Education of Adults (RELA) considers further insights regarding the connection between adult education and social inclusion with a special focus on equality, equity and social justice. Social justice thinking in adult education has predominantly been inspired by humanistic discourses. However, in recent times this basic inspiration is increasingly challenged by posthumanist, new materialist and indigenous discourses (Goodwin & Proctor, 2019). Furthermore, in the thematic issue of RELA particular attention will be paid to practices, policies, theories and methodologies of (social) inclusion. In line with this, we invite contributors to submit papers to RELA in connection with following themes:

- Strategies and practices aimed at enhancing of social inclusion through adult education and lifelong learning
- Policies of social inclusion for adult education and lifelong learning
- Adult education and lifelong learning for equity/equality and social justice
- Inclusion in the workplace through adult education
- Teacher training for inclusion in (adult)education
- The development of inclusive learning spaces in adult education
- Research methodologies relating to inclusive adult education
- Inclusion initiatives in higher education
- Creating inclusive learning environments for adults
- Conceptual debates on the meaning of inclusion through adult education

Contributions to this thematic issue can be submitted online to the journal by the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2023.

## References

Goodwin, S. & Proctor, H. (2019). Introduction: Social Justice Talk and Social Justice Practices in the Contemporary University. In: K. Freebody, S. Goodwin, & H. Proctor (Eds.), *Higher Education, Pedagogy and Social Justice* (pp 1-20). London: Macmillan.

Morrow, R. A. & Torres, C. A. (1995). *Social Theory and Education: A Critique of Theories of Social and Cultural Reproduction*. New York: Sunny Press.

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the political ecology of social inclusion and the legitimation of inclusive education, *Open Review of Educational Research*, 1(1).

Schreiber-Barsch, S. (2017). Is it the taking part that counts? Access to lifelong learning opportunities in Germany's regime of disability. In: G. Kong & E. Boeren (Eds.), *Adult Education for Inclusion and Diversity*. Proceedings of the 46<sup>th</sup> SCUTREA Conference (pp. 351-357). Edinburgh University: Centre for Research in Education, Inclusion and Diversity (CREID).

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