

From the Editor's desk

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The April edition of the Australian Journal of Adult Learning (AJAL) is being written at a time when Australia is in the middle of a Federal government election campaign. Adult Learning Australia (ALA) the adult learning sector peak organisation is calling for high quality adult education that is assessable for everyone and is responsive to community need. This is significant in the post-pandemic environment where adult learning, reskilling and retraining are important as old industries decline and new industries emerge. Quality adult education that is accessible is particularly important for second chance learners and workers retraining after being made redundant, migrant and refugee learners, learners with a disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners. ALA identifies five key policy areas which they perceive require attention by the party that forms a new government:

1. Adult community education (ACE) provides a 'second chance' to many Australians so they can reach their full potential. Regardless of financial or personal circumstances, we should all be able to access quality adult education when we need it.
2. The Australian government must commit to developing and resourcing a national adult literacy strategy that establishes a framework for increasing the levels of adult literacy by 20% at PIAAC 2031/32.

3. The capacity of the language literacy numeracy and digital skills workforce must be strengthened with access to free high quality professional development that provides them with opportunities to learn in ways that are applicable to their work settings.
4. A lifelong learning policy must be a national priority and a centrepiece for all educational policies in order to unlock the true potential of all Australians.
5. Australia needs a genuine commitment from the Australian government to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and genuine engagement with the ACE sector to ensure they are working towards those goals.

More information on ALA's call for access to quality adult education for all can be found here <https://ala.asn.au/election-2022/>.

The April edition of the journal has both a national and international focus. The articles are written on some important adult education issues of our time such as therapeutic landscape learning after the COVID 19 pandemic; professional learning in police education; lifelong learning and adult education in Japan; second chance learning in Africa; and adult education and processes of empowerment for people with mental health issues.

The first article from **Annette Foley, Helen Weadon, Sharon McDonough and Rachel Taylor** titled 'A gendered therapeutic learning landscape: Responding creatively to a pandemic' explores adult learning, the authors argue ... "crafting has occupied the hands and minds of women over many centuries providing vital connections with cultural skills and with community". The article explores how these regional women were able to remain connected and creative through crafting by establishing a *virtual crafting community*. Drawing on the theory of 'therapeutic landscapes', the paper claims the virtual craft group was able to support lifelong learning and wellbeing by bringing women together in a community of practice, reducing social isolation of individuals and developing new knowledge and skills socially and relationally, including increasing their support network and building friendships. The findings of the research have implications for adult education policy and practices as the authors argue researchers have drawn on therapeutic landscapes as a framework to reveal connections

between wellness and place. This is particularly pertinent as individuals and communities have experienced unprecedented levels of stress, mental illness and anxiety about the future as a result of the pandemic.

Anh Le and Stephen Billett's article, 'Lifelong learning and adult education in Japan provides an overview and insight into adult learning in Japan, an area which currently has a dearth of research. Surprisingly, Japan, unlike most developed nations where the focus of adult learning has been shaped by neoliberal reforms regarding work and economic outcomes, Adult learning in Japan focuses on learning and education for wellbeing, social engagement and personal enrichment. Whilst there is some emphasis on maintaining adult employability and the reemployment of retirees, adult education learning focuses on building social connections and health and wellbeing. With a burgeoning ageing population and the electoral power this group represents the authors' claim, "the provision of educational experiences is focused on longevity, cultural betterment, further education and reducing the social isolation of older Japanese". This article affirms current research on adult learning that notes the importance of place based adult learning for the ageing population, providing connections to community, personal fulfilment and enrichment and keeping people healthy and active across a lifespan (see Findsen & Formosa (2011); Golding & Kimberly (2016) for example).

Brett Shipton's article on 'Maximising Problem Based Learning (PBL) in police education: Why understanding the facilitator role is a key factor in developing learning for police problem-solving' is written in the context of the new professionalisation of policing in Australia (see Ryan, 2016 for example). The author argues traditional police education has been teacher centred with little engagement and encouragement for students who have limited input into the curriculum and pedagogy used in their education and training. As Shipton notes, "*Traditionally, police academy programs have tended to be teacher-centred and operate in an authority dependent context, which is problematic by inhibiting effective learning and failing to encourage proactive attributes from students*". Policing is a profession that requires diverse knowledge and skills as new recruits learn to 'become' police. The author argues for problem-based learning informed by Vygotsky's (1978) writing on education and learning. He claims ... "*police educators' professional knowledge and experience of academy teachers remains relevant,*

as they need to expand their awareness of learner-centred practice beyond being teacher-centred, rather than simply switching to learner-centred practice". PBL moves beyond teacher centred skills in police education, to pedagogy that is facilitated and an essential strategy in learner-centred methods. The challenge he argues is to bring the teacher centred practices and facilitated PBL together to enact professional learning that is learner centred.

Omar Keita and Ya-Hui Lee's article 'Transforming adult learners: The experiences of participating in the second chance education program'. This study outlines the experiences of second chance learners in an education program on the West Coast of Africa in The Gambia. This qualitative case study research claims learners faced barriers that hindered their full participation in the program. These barriers are both institutional and situational. The institutional barriers relate to an uncomfortable teaching and learning environment; inadequate resources such as teaching and learning materials. The situational barriers included issues of poverty, access to food, transportation, and distance from the learning centre. The majority of research participants engaged in the adult learning program in order to develop both educationally and to develop new skills for work and life. The authors argue that ... *"the participants benefit from the program in improved knowledge and skills, building confidence and connecting socially, taking care of personal issues, and helping others. In other words, the program empowered and transformed learners from improving themselves to helping others"*.

The final article in this edition of AJAL titled, 'Education as change: Liberation from mental illness and self-stigma in favour of empowerment', by authors **Joel Hedegaard and Martin Hugo** reveals how adult education can be a changing and liberating process for people with long term mental illness. This important qualitative research draws on semi-structured interviews with 22 research participants in life knowledge and creative arts courses in a Swedish Folk High School. The authors claim in Sweden the Folk High School system, is a part of Popular Adult Education, in the spirit of lifelong learning education, it holds a unique position in the Swedish education system as learning is directed to the whole person, and the knowledge and learning that is provided are related to a persons whole life experience. From the qualitative interviews, the authors

argue five themes emerged from the data. The adult learning courses provided a meaningful social context – to undergo change with others; self-awareness via non-violent communication – to change one's self-image; creating as rehabilitation – change through aesthetic learning processes; to function better in everyday life – to receive confirmation of change and finally, opportunity horizons – to change and hope for the future. The authors draw on Freire's writing on liberating education and argue the *"Folk High School's ambition with the two courses in the sense that liberating education is used to change the participants' self-image, reduce self-stigmatisation, and allow them to achieve a sense of empowerment"*. In this context, using teaching pedagogy and methods for recovery and orientation and dialogue based on principles of non-violent communication, in addition to the meaningful social context that the Folk High School offers, specific teaching methods and approaches are used for recovery and re-orientation. Using dialogue based on the principles of non-violent communication, the authors argue liberating processes are developed, built and created, in which self-consciousness has been allowed to bloom as a foundation for change in these participants' conception of themselves. The data in this paper provide an illuminating and powerful insight into the challenges that people with mental health issues face and how adult learning education can provide a conduit by which community connections are made and new knowledge, self-development and insight into mental health issues are able to flourish.

References:

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