

## **AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT LEARNING**

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133 From the Editor's desk

### **Refereed articles**

139 Common sense and police practice: It goes without saying

*Cheryl Ryan*

167 First-year university retention and academic performance of non-traditional students entering via an Australian pre-university enabling program

*Joanne G. Lisciandro*

202 Survival narratives from single mothers in an enabling program: 'Just hope you don't get sick and live off caffeine'

*Anne Braund, Trixie James, Katrina Johnston and Louise Mullaney*

236 COVID – 19 the Catalyst for a new paradigm in vocational education and training

*Susan Bandias, Rajeev Sharma and Alana Anderson*

257 The role of Learning Neighborhood Programme in achieving the necessary life skills for adult learners in Saudi Arabia to confront the COVID-19 crisis

*Obaidalah Aljohani and Sarah M. Alajlan*

### **Book review**

278 Out of the ruins: The emergence of radical informal learning spaces - Robert H Haworth & John M Elmore (editors).

*Reviewed by Meghan O'Brien*

**From the Editor's desk**  
**Associate Professor Trace Ollis**

Vale Dr Barrie Brennan

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I commence this July editorial with much sadness, acknowledging that Dr Barrie Brennan, ALA lifetime member, former editor of the journal and past President of the Australian Association of Adult Education (now ALA), passed away on the 18th of July 2022.

Barrie was an elder of adult learning education in Australia and a generous and talented academic who had an enormous impact on the sector. He was the editor of the Australian Journal of Adult Education (AJAE, now AJAL) for 6 years in the 1980s and the Australian Association of Adult Education (AAAE now ALA) President in the 1970s. He described this as AAAE's period of 'adolescence'.

Barrie was also involved with our international partners Asia Pacific Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) and the international adult education and development agency DVV. He was also a long-time Vice President of the Australian Folk High School Association.

He was renowned for his critical and capable critique of adult education policy and practice in the Australian and International context and for the advancement of women, encouraging women to take up leadership roles in adult learning, including in ALA. In Barry Golding's monograph,

“Reflection on 60 years of ALA” (2020), Barrie speaks on this:

On critical reflection a decade on, I believe the ‘introduction’ of women onto AAAE committees between the 1970s and 1990s and then ‘en masse’ was a major and positive influence on AAAE and Australian Adult Education. There was just one female on the Board when I joined (Joan Allsop), but a female became President the year after I retired as President in the early 1980s. For me, a key factor then (as now) was that problems in adult education had to be tackled at ‘ground level’, and women in female groups proved to be particularly effective at doing this in the local town or suburban areas.

In recent years, Barrie championed issues of adult learning education in rural communities in the broader Tamworth region of NSW, highlighting adult learning in rural sites and spaces in the country areas around him.

Barrie was an incredibly generous colleague and very encouraging and welcoming of me as the new incoming journal editor in 2017. He held a great deal of institutional history and knowledge of the journal and adult learning in Australia and for this, we are most grateful.

On behalf of the Editorial and Board of AJAL, we send our sincere and deepest sympathies to Barrie’s family and friends. Notably, we are a stronger and more resilient sector because of Barrie’s contribution to the practices and scholarship of adult learning in Australia and internationally.

This issue of AJAL is focused on three important areas of adult learning, professional learning, transition pathways to higher education and adult learning in the context of COVID 19. The articles represent the broad context of adult learning in Australia and internationally. In this edition, articles inform us on professional learning in policing and help us understand the contemporary condition of police work and education for police. Two articles examine and explore transition pathways to education in the Australian context,

these important programs are set in the background of the massification of higher education and Bradley's review promise access and equity in education. Both articles explore the tensions and contradictions inherent in providing enabling programs for access and equity students. AJAL is presently receiving many articles on the impact of COVID 19 on adult education with two articles in this issue. Unsurprisingly given COVID 19 has affected so much of our lives, work and learning. Notable is adult learning moving from embodied relational and material ways of learning to online and blended forms of learning, delivered through online learning platforms and workshops held by zoom technologies. Adult education settings have had to adjust to these new ways of working and learning.

The first article explores professional learning in the context of police practice. Cheryl Ryan's article "Common sense and police practice: It goes without saying". The paper investigates police professional learning and training in the context of one Australian jurisdiction of policing. This narrative research examines discursive practices of policing, focussed on making judgements through embodied processes such as intuition, hunches and common sense. Common sense is viewed by police as an intrinsic "attribute of policing". Ryan argues, "Anything requiring complex thought and inquiry is viewed in opposition to common sense". The research notes the necessary shift from ideas of policing as a craft or trade, one which is learned on the job and has dominated police training to a more nuanced and contemporary understanding of police practice which has both theory and practice at its core. Using the narratives of police, the article reveals three examples of officers' perceptions of common sense in policing. She argues police need to become more agentic and attentive about their education and training and that the focus on "common-sense" is viewed by many as "good sense" and includes conceptions of what police "should know". The author claims police education should move beyond concrete material understandings of policing to education and training which deploys the theoretical as well as the practical mastering of policing. The focus on common sense as a practice is antithetical to the ongoing national and

international debates about police and professionalisation, as Ryan claims there are dangers in this unqualified acceptance of “common sense” in police practice. She claims in the new era of the professionalisation of policing, police require quality education experiences.

Enabling programs and pathways for single mothers are a focus of the next article “Just hope you don’t get sick and live off caffeine” by Trixie James, Louise Mullaney, Katrina Johnston and Anne Braund. The paper claims the number of single mothers accessing non-traditional transition pathways and enabling education programs at Universities is growing. This research conducted with seven women all of whom are young single mothers, about their experiences of education, reveals the unique and oftentimes difficult struggles these women face in their journey to achieve an undergraduate degree. What the research uncovers is that even with these inherent difficulties these students achieved great accomplishments, becoming more confident and resilient by building relationships and seeking support from both peers and university staff. The research disclosed the learning experiences of these women expressed as “survival narratives” were empowering and transformative experiences. The authors argue the support services that are available to young mothers in these enabling programs are crucial to their success in higher education.

Joanne Lisandro’s article continues our focus on the importance of university pathways and enabling programs. Her paper “First-year university retention and academic performance of non-traditional students entering via an Australian pre-university enabling program”.

She notes transition pathway programs to education have expanded under the project of the massification of higher education. Lisandro argues whilst the programs have become increasingly popular, limited evaluation of the effectiveness and outcomes of these enabling courses are currently available. The paper compares and contrasts first-year retention and academic outcomes of students in the ‘on track’ enabling programs between 2014 and 2016. Most of the students who participated in this program were access and equity students - many first in family at university. The

article compared the outcome of the OnTrack-pathway students with students who accessed university through the conventional entry requirements of ATAR. She argues the research revealed the “OnTrack” students were retained at a rate that was similar to or better than students entering via all other admission pathways, despite their poorer academic performance. Multivariate regression modelling revealed that admission pathway, demographic and enrolment factors explained very little of the observed variation in student outcomes and were poor predictors of academic underperformance or success. Lisandro claims the findings in this study provide empirical data to reveal enabling programs that have been successful in providing access and participation to students who are capable learners but otherwise lack the resources to study at university, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The impact of COVID 19 on a vocation education and training program is explored by Susan Rajeev and Alana Anderson in their paper “COVID – 19 the catalyst for a new paradigm in vocational education and training ”. The paper commences by providing a context and an overview of the impacts of COVID 19 on the VET sector in the Northern Territory of Australia. It positions the research in the context of the current VET regulatory environment and the compliance requirements of the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). The methodology for the paper is mixed methods research, which uses face-to-face interviews and telephone calls to gather data from stakeholders about the effectiveness of the programs. The paper uncovers the intricacy of providing online adult learning to a majority of international students cohort and the complexity of delivering a VET program of its kind requiring specialist vocational education and training pedagogy to support its implementation online. The paper concludes with a call for a new paradigm and policy shift in the delivery of Online vocational education and training in the post-COVID-19 environment.

In the final article for this edition, we are transported to a neighbourhood learning program in Saudi Arabia. Obeidallah Aljohani’s article titled: “The role of Learning

Neighborhood programme in achieving the necessary life skills for adult learners in Saudi Arabia to confront the COVID-19 crisis". In Saudi Arabia, the "Learning Neighbourhood Program" assists adult learners to have the skills to solve complex problems in a rapidly changing world of accelerated progress and change. Saudi Arabia's Learning Neighbourhood Programme provides many courses, such as vocational skills, literacy, and life skills, for adult learners. In the context of the global pandemic of COVID 19, the program was also used to assist adult learners in their local communities to achieve the necessary knowledge and skills to prevent illness during the pandemic. This quantitative study's purpose was to illustrate the benefits of life skills that adult learners needed to help them during the COVID-19 crisis in Saudi Arabia. The programs focus on skills for living such as critical thinking, communication and problem-solving were crucial to participants having up-to-date information about the risks associated with the COVID 19 virus. The findings revealed many of the survey respondents reported that their knowledge from the life-skills course assisted members of their families to clarify any misconceptions they might have about the pandemic. Crucial to this was the importance and accuracy of their communication skills. The study found that those who enrolled in multiple courses in the educated-neighbourhood program practised these skills during the crisis of the pandemic and there were also some differences in the development of life skills based on gender. The article concludes by espousing the importance and effectiveness of the Learning Neighbourhood Program during the COVID 19 crisis.

## Book Review

Robert H Haworth and John M Elmore (eds) (2017. *Out of the ruins: The emergence of radical informal learning spaces*. Reviewed by Meghan O'Brien, Deakin University