

# AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT LEARNING

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## **From the Editor's desk**

Associate Professor Trace Ollis

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### **Vale Professor Chris Duke**

The passing of Professor Chris Duke has left the adult learning discipline and community grieving. Chris was a respected figure in the adult education community and a leader in the field worldwide. He held esteemed positions as a professor at RMIT University and Glasgow Universities and was a husband, father, and talented gardener. While I will delve only a little into his scholarship and work in Australia and beyond, it is worth noting that he was an internationally recognised figure in education. This was evident through his long-standing involvement with ASPAE and PIMA, where he served as a bulletin editor for over 25 years. Those who want to know more about Chris's work and dedication to adult education should read the recent PIMA bulletin. This special edition details his work in Australiana and internationally, highlighting his remarkable commitment to adult and lifelong learning. It also shares stories about Chris, showcasing his unwavering devotion to family, colleagues, friends, and community. Unfortunately, we received news of Chris's passing during the June UALL conference at Cambridge University. At the conference dinner, Professor Annette Foley, a member of AJAL's editorial board and current Vice President of ALA, paid a fitting tribute to Chris, celebrating the impact of his work and dedication to adult and lifelong learning. On behalf of the journal,

we extend our sincere condolences to Chris's family, friends, and colleagues. Undoubtedly, his adult and lifelong learning work will be a lasting legacy.

The July 2023 issue of the journal contains papers from Australia, Sweden, China, the United States, and Turkey. It includes articles discussing contemporary issues related to adult learning, such as gender-specific learning spaces for men in Men's Sheds, the experiences of working-class mothers in choosing post-secondary schooling for their children, and adult education. In the higher adult learning space, a paper examines the experiences of Chinese PhD students and their supervisors.

The first paper for the edition discusses Men's sheds and is based on research conducted in Sweden, New Zealand, and Australia. Helene Ahl, Barry Golding, and Joel Hedegaard suggest that certain homogeneous adult learning groups may be necessary to promote diversity. Their paper, *"Why some homogeneous adult learning groups may be necessary for encouraging diversity: A theory of conditional social equality"*, challenges homogeneity in adult learning within the men's shed movement. The research draws on data from Denmark, Australia, and New Zealand to challenge normative and reductive accounts of inequality expressed in the theory of Conditional Social Equality. Men's sheds began in Australia as a space where men could meet, share knowledge and skills and learn informally. They have been widely documented to positively impact the participants' mental health, well-being, and relationships with their partners, as women also benefit from men's involvement in the sheds. The authors argue that there is a need for homosocial groups, as they provide an essential space that enables men to learn from and develop solidarity with other men. However, the authors also claim that while there is solidarity and understanding across class issues, the spaces do not always include differences and lack cultural and sexual diversity.

In the paper titled *"Post-school dilemmas in diminished society: Working-class mothers' perspectives of choices and realities in their communities"* by Piper Rodd, data from a study conducted in Australia is analysed to understand the views of working-class parents regarding the opportunities available to their children after completing school

in contemporary Australia. Rodd examines the concepts of "cruel optimism" and "diminished society" as well as the idea of a "collective community" that comes with success through education, aspiration, and achievement among young Australians. The author argues that neoliberal social and economic policies become normalised when financial circumstances dictate political and ideological realities. Using a broad critical theory approach, the paper critiques issues related to economic disadvantage and schooling and explores the impact of neoliberalism on the choices and options these families have when considering their children's higher education and work aspirations. The data presented in the paper indicates that working-class mothers possess valuable insights into the barriers they face in this regard. According to the paper's data, working-class mothers have a significant understanding of the challenges they encounter while preparing for their children's future career success. They also tend to favour vocational education opportunities such as apprenticeships or other vocational work pathways over higher education. The paper sheds light on working-class families' difficulties regarding schooling and raises important questions about inequality regarding post-secondary education options for children from these families.

Amidst the current concerns about Chinese students studying in Australia and the growing dependence of universities on income generated from international students, Jian Xu and Wai-wan Vivian Chan have written an article titled *"Doing and supervising China Studies PhD projects in Australia: Experiences of Chinese PhD students and Australian supervisors"*. The article provides insight into the experiences of Chinese PhD students conducting research in Australia and the perspectives of their Australian supervisors. The research is qualitative and based on semi-structured interviews. It interprets the challenges, expectations, and experiences of PhD supervisors and students studying for a PhD in Australia. The research findings reveal conflicting expectations between Chinese PhD students and their supervisors regarding completion timelines and academic standards. Due to their upbringing in a communist system that emphasises the ideology of historical materialism, Chinese students may hesitate to critique government policies related to their research, causing tension for students and supervisors. The study's qualitative data is presented through participants' and supervisors' narratives, providing Australian

universities with insight into Chinese PhD students' cultural and educational challenges. This knowledge can help universities offer better research training and attract more international students, including those from China.

Jen Ouellette-Schramm's paper, "*Self-authored motivations of US adult basic education English learners*" explores why many adult English learners enrolled in adult basic education programs. These programs are designed to improve their literacy and English language skills, increasing their chances of entering the workforce. However, the author argues that it needs to be clarified whether the federal government's program's goals align with the learners' goals. In this article, the author utilises "self-authorship" a theory of adult development from psychology to analyse a small group of three individuals learning English as a second language. The article explores the unique learning motivations of these individuals and provides suggestions for adult education programs to cater to the self-authored learning needs of future adult English learners.

The final article, "*Cultural participation patterns of prospective teachers in the context of informal learning*", by Peri Tutar, outlines the lifelong learning culture of teacher candidates in Turkey. The study employs Bourdieu's theory of Cultural Capital, defined as the sum of intellectual qualities. The research collected data through a cultural participation survey focused on future teachers' cultural participation patterns. This quantitative study used various statistical methods such as frequency, percentage, chi-square testing, t-testing, and one-way variance analysis (ANOVA). The findings indicate that the parent's education level and income status significantly influenced education levels, work status, and family income. However, the study found no significant difference based on the class they studied or their parents' working status.

## **Why some homogeneous adult learning groups may be necessary for encouraging diversity: A theory of conditional social equality**

Helene Ahl  
Jönköping University, Sweden

Joel Hedegaard  
Jönköping University, Sweden

Barry Golding  
Federation University

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*This paper proposes a new theory of Conditional Social Equality (CSE) which in some ways challenges the theory of cumulative advantage/disadvantage (CAD), which postulates that inequalities and social divisions necessarily increase over time. Using evidence from informal learning groups in Men's Sheds in three countries, we conclude that some social divisions between homosocial groups, in this case groups of older men, may actually decrease – but only under certain conditions. Male-gendered learning groups that were relatively homogeneous by age helped erase class divisions and softened gender stereotypes. Our theory of conditional social equality (CSE) predicts the following: i) in-group homogeneity can enable the acceptance of some aspects*

*of heterogeneity, ii) some other aspects of in-group heterogeneity may not be tolerated, thus maintaining in-group cohesion, and iii), in-group homogeneity and boundary setting towards out-groups may be prerequisites for the acceptance of (some) aspects of in-group heterogeneity. All of this has important implications for adult learning in both heterogeneous and homogenous groups.*

**Keywords:** *cumulative advantage/disadvantage, gender stereotypes, homosocial reproduction, older men's learning, adult community education (ACE)*

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## **Introduction**

Socio-economic inequalities between groups of people tend to increase with age. The older people get, the bigger the difference becomes between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' in the same initial cohort. This was formulated in the theory of cumulative advantage/disadvantage (CAD) (Crystal & Shea, 1990; Dannefer, 2003). CAD suggests that not only are people born with unequal conditions, but that inequalities in any given characteristic, such as money, education, health, or status increase over time (Dannefer, 2003: 327). People with relatively well-educated parents tend to become better educated themselves, and vice versa. The difference is accentuated over time: a person's level of education tends to predict their engagement in adult learning.

Gorard (2010: 359) neatly summarises and questions the inequity of all of this when taking a life-course view, noting that:

*'... qualifications are not seen as a causatory agent at all but as a substitute variable summing up the individual, social and economic determinants of 'success' at school and beyond. Educators do not select their potential students, nor employers their employees, on the basis of their economic status, ethnicity or age, as this is both unfair and illegal. However, they do select them on a substitute variable – prior education - that sums up, and is very heavily collected with, such background factors. What is the sense in that?'*



Thus, people with higher levels of formal education tend to engage more in formalised adult learning throughout their lives, while those with only compulsory school experience tend not to. This increasing inequity plays out across life in the workforce and in turn effects people's health, wellbeing, quality of later life and even longevity (Borrell et al., 2014; Hudson, 2016; Marmot, 2000; Zhong et al., 2017). Social divisions also tend to become accentuated due to homosocial reproduction, the human tendency to socialize and associate with people who are like us (Kanter, 1977; Moore, 1962; Rivera, 2013). Men tend to 'hang out' more with men, the better-educated with others who are better-educated, and so on. Groups thus tend to become increasingly homogeneous rather than heterogeneous. Without the opportunity to learn from people from other walks of life and break this vicious and inequitable cycle, it becomes more difficult across the life course to counteract social divisions and rising inequalities between groups.

This paper is inspired by observations in gendered, informal adult learning contexts, specifically in community Men's Sheds, that challenge the ubiquity of CAD. CAD is a somewhat deterministic theory, provoking ideas as to what might be done to counteract such processes. Observations to this effect were made in empirical studies of Men's Sheds. Men's Sheds are community-based workshops offering men beyond paid work "somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to" (Golding, 2015). Men's Sheds have been comprehensively researched from an adult education as well as a health perspective, with at least 70 peer-reviewed research articles published to date (Golding, 2021). Results show that the informal and participatory learning based on practical work that takes place 'shoulder to shoulder' with other men in Men's Sheds has positive effects on health and wellbeing of older men (Cavanagh et al., 2014; Golding, 2015; Golding, Foley, & Brown, 2007; Haesler, 2015; Morgan et al., 2007).

Most Men's Shed participants are older and beyond paid work. In Australia, the Shedder median age is approximately 70 years. Shedders are self-selecting and thus come from all walks of life, even if the majority has a working-class background and, as Foley (2014: 65) observes, often fall outside "... the privileged or dominant [masculinist] hegemonic frame [and] experience health and wellbeing disadvantages". And participants in Men's Sheds are predominantly men (but some do welcome women). Some critics hold that Men's Sheds are places for

uncritical reproduction of outdated ideas of masculinity (Boucher & Robinson, 2021), but the absence of women has indeed been found to be one of the success factors (Ahl, Hedegaard, & Golding, 2017; Golding, 2015). The research question is therefore: *Can learning in gender homogeneous groups challenge patterns of social division and equality, and if so, what patterns and how?*

The subsequent, recent development of the Women's Shed movement adds particular relevance to the current investigation – most of the Women's Sheds (124 open to 2021) are similarly homogeneous by sex and most operate exclusively for women. Though sometimes Women's Shed groups share a Men's Shed workshop space, in most cases it is usually with women on another day (Golding, Carragher, & Foley, 2021).

Homogeneity may of course be conceptualized in many different ways. In this paper, we use some of the classifications typically present in anti-discrimination laws: gender, ethnicity/race, disability, sexual orientation, and age. We start with a review of literature relevant to the study, including the theory of CAD, older men's learning trajectories, and previous research on Men's Sheds. After a section on the methodology, we present the results in the form of a narrative, collective, autoethnographic field report. In the discussion section, we interpret our results and conclude by formulating a theory of conditional social equality (CSE). In the final section, we suggest ways in which future research might test our theory.

### **Cumulative advantage/disadvantage and its manifestations**

CAD pays attention to the increasing gap between people in favourable positions versus people in less favourable positions. It ultimately draws attention to the way inequalities develop over the life course (Crystal & Shea, 1990; Dannefer, 2003; Hudson, 2016). Primarily, the focus lies on the differential distribution of resources that affect health and wellbeing, and the tendency for these resources to become more unevenly distributed with age (Crystal & Shea, 1990). Common measures of the expression of CAD are longevity and life expectancy among different cohorts. In the U.S., Marmot (2000) demonstrates this emphatically by the 20 year difference in life expectancy between socio-economically advantaged White people living in the outskirts of Washington compared to relatively disadvantaged Black people living in the city

centre. Similar studies with similar results have been conducted in 16 European cities (Borrell et al., 2014) and China (Zhong et al., 2017).

Translating CAD to adult educational settings implies, for instance, that countries with generally elevated levels of formal education might see a higher proportion of participants in adult education, especially in formal educational settings (Ingham et al., 2017). There are also observed differences within many countries, where people in rural areas are less inclined to participate in adult education compared to people living in urban areas (Sherman & Sage, 2011; Ulrich, 2011). Focusing on specific groups of participants, research has shown that women are much more likely to participate in adult education than men (Jenkins & Mostafa, 2015; Knipprath & De Rick, 2015; McGivney, 1999). Further, in terms of socio-economic background, it is primarily the already relatively highly-qualified adults who participate in adult education (Albert et al., 2010; Boeren, 2009; Bjursell et al., 2017; European Commission, 2010; Roosmaa & Saar, 2012; Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2017). In terms of age, studies show that it is mainly middle-aged (45 to 65 years old) people who participate in adult education, often after child rearing and before retirement from paid work, and typically with some vocational intent or benefit (Albert et al., 2010). When comparing different countries to each other, the participation rate among 55-74 years olds varies from approximately 20 per cent in northern Europe to below 10 per cent in the Mediterranean countries (European Commission, 2011).

Thus, the resource that adult education constitutes is unevenly distributed and homosocial reproduction is clearly present. Participation in adult education has proved to be a way for older people to maintain social and community connections beyond paid work and continue to be included in society. However, the benefits of learning are again greatest for the least educated (Myers & Myles, 2005), including promoting their health and wellbeing (Field, 2011; Hedegaard & Hugo, 2020; Hughes & Adriaanse, 2017; Jenkins & Mostafa, 2015; Waller et al., 2018). This benefit, in turn, contributes to predict health outcomes (Borrell et al., 2014; OECD, 2012; Zhong et al., 2017). Adult education in general, and formal adult education in particular, thus seems to again reinforce rather than challenge cumulative advantage/disadvantage.

## **The underrepresentation of men in formal adult education**

Being important for health and wellbeing, participation in adult education becomes a concern not only from a learning and development perspective, but also from a quality-of-life perspective (Lohr, 1989) as well as for the wellbeing of the community (Merriam & Kee, 2014). But as previously mentioned, it is primarily more formally educated women who participate in formal adult education, whereas men, particularly the relatively less formally educated ones, are largely missing and sometimes arguably excluded (McGivney, 1999; Albert, García-Serrano, & Hernanz, 2010; Boeren, 2009; European Commission, 2010; Roosmaa & Saar, 2012). Women are over-represented in formal adult education in all European countries, as well as in Australia and New Zealand (Desjardins, 2020 p. 152). So are senior women (Andersson et al., 2014; Jenkins & Mostafa, 2015; Knipprath & De Rick, 2015) and urban residents (Sherman & Sage, 2011; Ulrich, 2011). Denmark, one of our case countries, is no exception. Danish men, not least seniors, are likely to favour informal activities, particularly fishing and hunting in their leisure time, whereas women participate in creative and cultural activities organized in the form of adult community education (Eske, Rask, & Thøgersen, 2022, pp. 45-47,63) – women comprised 73 per cent of learners in evening classes in a large Danish municipality (Bjerrum & Thøgersen, 2016, p. 43).

The formality of the adult education arrangement itself may be an obstacle for men. Studies show that men, particularly men with lower levels of completed formal education may have had negative experiences as boys from school and resist forms of education that patronise them as ‘students’ which is reminiscent of their failures with early schooling (Foley & Golding, 2014; Paldanius, 2007). Such negative experiences, or memories, may also have a gender dimension. Girls consistently out-participate and outperform boys in school (Schuller, 2018), and most forms of post-school education, including university, in most relatively developed nations (Houtte, 2004; Öhrn et al., 2017). School teachers are also more likely to be women than men, particularly in the lower grades (Burusic et al., 2012). Negative memories from school may thus be associated with negative judgements from female teachers and from girls that typically outcompete boys.

So, even if adult education has many beneficial effects, many formal forms of adult education may not attract men, particularly those men who tend to make up the majority of the participants in a Men's Shed, namely older men, primarily from hands-on or rural work backgrounds. Indeed, research on Men's Sheds has shown that many participants prefer self-directed, flexible, and informal activities, without the presence of women, and without curriculum, courses, formal teachers and teaching, or assessment, where the focus is on sharing what they know and can do rather than being confronted with what they do not know, and where they are able to positively share this knowledge informally with other men in local and social communities of hands-on practice (Golding, 2015; Hedegaard & Ahl, 2019).

### **Men's informal learning at Men's Shed**

Starting in Australia in the 1990s, the Men's Shed is a growing social movement with approximately 2,800 Men's Sheds open worldwide pre-COVID (Golding, 2021). The participant group is largely older, retired, working-class men; a group relatively disadvantaged in terms of education, health, income, and social status. However, Men's Sheds attract men from all walks of life, also well-educated and professional men. A Shed is a self-organized collective workshop, often equipped with woodworking or other tools, but may also have a kitchen, a computer room, or a garden – every shed is different.

Men's Sheds have been found to benefit older men's learning, health, wellbeing, and social integration. They provide an environment that typically allows men to feel 'at home' and comfortable, thus improving their social connections and overall wellbeing (Foley, 2014). Traditional class divisions tend to be erased, and participants are able to relinquish stereotypical "macho" male identities in favour of prosocial, softer, caring male identities – indeed a positive male role with an emphasis on care as well as social and community responsibility has emerged (Cavanagh et al., 2014; Golding, 2015; Golding et al., 2007; Morgan et al., 2007). Haesler (2015) found that Sheds assisted older men in relinquishing the idea that masculinity equals strength and invulnerability. Instead, it was constructed as masculine in Australian Sheds to care about one's health as well as the health of one's fellow Shed participants.

Research has identified four primary keys to the success of Sheds:

1. Sheds offer men practical, gender-stereotypical, hands-on activities such as wood- or metal-working
2. they are self-organized, so service providers are kept at arm's length
3. men are not patronised as customers, patients, students, or clients from deficit models of provision, and
4. women are typically not present in the Shed (Golding, 2015; Ahl et al., 2017).

Golding (2015) found that typically, some resourceful and energetic men would assume the role of project leader or chairperson and help organize the Shed as well as engage in fundraising activities for the Shed. Other men with more practical knowledge and skill would take charge of building, reconstructing or repurposing an old facility to make it safe and fit for the purposes at hand. They would also become appreciated informal mentors and teachers in the workshops. Yet other men belonged to the category that would “be dead without the Shed”; often older, less skilled, or physically impaired men for whom going to the Shed and meeting new friends gave their life new meaning, even if it was just to share ‘a chat and a cuppa’ in the company of men (Golding, 2015). Some Sheds have also served as mentors for young boys at risk, who have found a place of refuge among the older men in the Shed (Cordier & Wilson, 2014). While much has been written about the beneficial effects of Sheds for the participants, and the reasons for such positive effects, less attention has been given to the issues of inclusion and social equality.

In summary, we have observed that Men's Shed can act as a refuge for men and a homely ‘third place’, aside from work and home, where men from different social classes and diverse work backgrounds meet. We have also seen examples of intergenerational learning between men and boys. Unlike much of formal adult education, Men's Sheds have thus been able to break patterns of homosocial reproduction regarding social class, and in the cases of mentorship, also regarding age. But at the same time, homosocial reproduction linked to gender prevails. How can this be understood? This is an issue to which we turn in the current paper.

## **Material and method**

The data used in the present study were collected by Helene Ahl and Joel Hedegaard from Men's Sheds in Denmark in 2016 and in 2018 and in New Zealand and Australia in 2017, as well as by Barry Golding from Australian Sheds in 2019/20. In total, we have notes from participant observations and conversations from a total of 22 Men's Sheds. Our data also includes focus-group interviews with 24 male shedders, focus-group interviews with 36 female partners of participating men, and individual interviews with 17 female partners. Visits to Men's Sheds typically lasted from several hours to half a day. The focus group interviews lasted between 30 and 75 minutes, and the individual interviews averaged approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were recorded and fully transcribed, and the interview data were analysed for recurrent themes.

Although the Sheds in the three countries in which the data collection took place differ in terms of how they were initially organized and financed (top-down in Denmark through the Ministry of Health, versus bottom-up in Australia and New Zealand through grassroots or community initiatives) the outcome and how the Sheds work are similar (Ahl et al., 2017; Golding, 2015). In Denmark, the participants took over the management and organization of the Sheds once started, so the four success factors referred to above were present in all three contexts. Regardless of the country, the Sheds are participant-driven and based on what the older men are interested in and find meaning in doing.

While we have a very rich international data set, it should be noted that the data were originally collected for two different research projects with different research questions, namely i) organizing principles for Men's Sheds, and ii) gender identities and involvement patterns among Sheds participants and their partners. Both studies were reported elsewhere (Ahl et al., 2017; Foley, Golding, & Weadon, 2023; Hedegaard & Ahl, 2019). The current research question was triggered by the stories we heard and by our observations of some consistent patterns and themes in the narrative data emerging from our visits to many different Men's Sheds in the three countries. In the current paper, we therefore rely primarily on observational data and our joint reflections from the analysis of the conversations and interviews. In our rereading of the

narratives in the transcript material, we identified themes concerning age, gender, segregated groups, social class, masculinity, disability, sexual orientation, and ethnicity/race. We employ narrative research, or storytelling as a method of inquiry (Linghede et al., 2016). The data from Men's Sheds which supports our theory is presented in the form of a reconstructed, collaborative autoethnographic account (Chang et al., 2016). Muncey (2010: 148) describes autoethnography as 'an engagement in an iterative relationship between [our] research and [our] personal experiences'.

We understand and present the autoethnography that follows in terms identified by Mykhalovskiy (1996), neatly summarised by Muncey (2010: 93). Our account is a social, collaborative and dialogic process engaging with a journal readership. As authors, we are not being self-indulgent or seeking truth in this account or in our theory. We are engaging with the critical reviewer and the reader and seeking to contribute to sociological understanding by encouraging debate and discussion. As Muncey (2010: 93) put it, 'Do you, the reader, find any value in what has been written?'

Our experiences presented as an autoethnography revolve around a visit to a composite Shed, the content of which is selectively drawn from the entirety of the collected material. The narrative construction of our story is based on theory, on the research question at hand, on the results of the analysis and interpretation of the collected data material and our reflections on our understandings of what this might signify. In practical terms, a plot was constructed that could hold the identified themes and display a contextual meaning (Polkinghorne, 1988). Having built a plot, we went back to our material to identify observations or instances that could be used as building blocks in our story. The narrative serves the purpose of synthesizing, illustrating, and communicating our findings in a manner that saves time and space, but also holds the promise of evoking a response in the reader that the ordinary logico-scientific way of representing data cannot (Linghede et al., 2016). The following story is thus constructed but based on solid data. It is a story of a visit to a typical Men's Shed, with characters taken from actual Sheds. Similarly, the quotes below are not verbatim. What one person says below is a conglomeration of many utterances, but the content is representative and a reconstruction of actual quotes.



## **A field report from a Shed**

We arrived at the Shed around nine o'clock in the morning, and were greeted by the chairperson, a former project leader who had retired from a large manufacturing company. He showed us the facility – a formerly deserted, now repurposed elementary school that the community had given to the men and that they had lovingly and skillfully restored. Several men were busy in the workshop, making outdoor furniture for preschools. Other men sat at the computers, some others worked in the adjacent garden while still another group played cards in the coffee room. All of them were grey-haired, wearing unobtrusive clothes – work pants, t-shirts, knitted sweaters or plaid flannel shirts. And all were white. They didn't take much notice of us, but merrily engaged in conversation when approached. A group of men was busy in the kitchen preparing today's lunch for the whole group, some of which was gathered from the garden. They had integrated cooking with a cooking class, on a rotating schedule, so that all participants could learn how to cook. We asked them what the point was with a Shed only for men. "Well, if the wives were here, they would just take command of the whole place and rearrange the pots and pans so we could never find them again – we wouldn't get a chance to learn how to cook".

The chairperson explained to us that it is important for many of the men that any significant women in their lives are not there. It gives them a homely space away from home which helps them open up to each other 'shoulder to shoulder'. He says that women have eye-to-eye conversations and get straight to the point, but most men tend to go about it differently: "They start working together on some project, quietly, shoulder to shoulder. The next day they start talking, and the following day they may forget about their work and just talk to each other, even eye-to-eye as trust grows and the nature of the conversation deepens".

Another participant tells us how he has started to care for his health. "The wife has nagged me about taking my blood pressure for years – but here I see other men lining up for it, so I just do it myself, too". Outside there is some construction work going on. "We take long walks together to get some exercise, but many men have bad knees and cannot participate, so we are building a petanque court so everyone can get outside and move about a little". The members have also constructed a

ramp for men with limited mobility so they can have easy access to the facilities. We see more signs of men caring for each other – people tell us that if someone has not shown up for some time, they will call them up or drop in to see that everything is all right.

We walk over to an old vintage car in a corner of the workshop that is being restored by some men. We talk to one of them, a retired banker, who proudly demonstrates an iron wheel rim he has built in cooperation with a former goldsmith and a retired farmer. “We needed a missing rim and didn’t know how to make one, but the goldsmith said that it shouldn’t be any more difficult than making a ring, just bigger. So, we made one!” Another group of men – formerly a CEO, a business consultant, a builder, and a car mechanic – demonstrate an ongoing boat building project. The builder and the car mechanic become the teachers whereas the others happily participate and learn in good camaraderie.

We ask many of the men what their partners say about them being away at the Shed the whole day, and they all answer that their wives are quite happy to their own time and do their own thing during the day, and that they will then both have something independent to do and interesting to talk about at night. Noting that all of them refer to their wives, we ask the chairperson if none of them has a male partner. He flinches, as such a thing would be unthinkable. “No”, he said, “Everyone is, or was, married to a woman. We do not have any homosexuals here. And if we did, they likely wouldn’t let it be known – that would probably jeopardize their acceptance among the other men.”

Noting the lack of cultural diversity in the group, in spite of the area having a considerably large immigrant population from diverse ethnic origins in the neighbourhood, we asked why this might be so. The answers indicated a very clear demarcation between them and us. “We don’t think they’d fit in here”, said one of the men. “And we don’t think they would be interested in coming either”. The answers were delivered in a tone that did not invite further questioning. When we left the premises, the chairperson gave the female researcher a bouquet of flowers while the male researcher was greeted with a firm handshake.

## **Discussion**

Having read about, and experienced, primarily positive, and inclusive effects at Men's Sheds, we observed that some mechanisms of exclusion including by racial or ethnic background and sexual orientation were present. Perhaps this is unsurprising as racism and homophobia are still present amongst citizens in all of the countries in which we collected data, despite being discriminatory and illegal. We noted that while some Men's Sheds were able to overcome some inequalities, other social divisions remained firmly in place. With some exceptions, Men's Shed groups we studied were homogeneous in respect of gender, sexual orientation, age, and ethnicity/race. They were able to overcome heterogeneity in terms of disability, education, and social class – the well-educated and well-to-do men cooperated on an equal basis with men from working-class backgrounds. It appears that when older men get to do gender stereotypical activities in sex segregated groups, they are able to relinquish class divisions. We also observed that masculinity was renegotiated – the strongman at the helm was relinquished in favour of a flatter and more inclusive Men's Shed organisation, and a caring masculinity, in which members with diverse abilities including disabilities were well taken care of. The men were thus able to overcome (some) gender stereotypes – provided that no women were present.

But we also noted that differences in terms of gender, ethnicity/race, and sexual orientation were not universally tolerated. Whilst homogeneity in terms of sex, age, ethnicity/race, and sexual orientation seemed a prerequisite for erasing class divisions and for relinquishing some stereotypical aspects of masculinity, other divisions and boundaries remained firmly in place. In terms of the theory of cumulative advantaged/disadvantaged (CAD), we conclude that CAD is not deterministic. To answer our research question of whether learning in gender homogeneous groups can challenge patterns of social division and equality, and if so, what patterns and how, we found that in informal learning groups that were homogenous by sex, it was possible to break some patterns of social divisions and inequality, but conditionally so. Learning informally in homogeneous groups appears to encourage the erasure of some inequalities, but can reproduce others, and the former appears conditional on the latter. We use these observations to formulate a theory of conditional social equality (CSE) which may provide a partial antidote to CAD.

The theory of CSE predicts that in adult and community education (ACE):

1. in-group homogeneity can enable the acceptance of some aspects of heterogeneity
2. some other aspects of in-group heterogeneity may not be tolerated, thus maintaining in-group cohesion
3. in-group homogeneity and boundary setting towards out-groups can be prerequisites for the acceptance of (some) aspects of in-group heterogeneity.

In our case, homogeneity in terms of gender and age tended to erase class divisions, but tended to reinforce gender segregation and divisions of ethnicity/race and sexual orientation. One might find other configurations, such as in a study by Carroll et al. (2014), where homogeneity in terms of class and gender enabled the acceptance of diversity in terms of ethnicity/race, but not in terms of class. Low-income men from a poor background in that study were very uncomfortable with those better off.

Group homogeneity or homosocial reproduction can be seen as a barrier to access and equity in adult community education. A common goal for adult community education is to increase democracy, diversity, and participation in society, but in many cases, adult community education classes tend to be promoted to and attract like-minded people of similar backgrounds and with similar interests. In Denmark and Sweden, for example, there are Folk High Schools that deliberately cater to certain age, religious, or ethnic groups as well as those with particular disabilities (Borsch, Skovdal & Smith Jervelund, 2019; Hedegaard & Hugo, 2020; Hedegaard, Hugo, & Bjursell, 2021). The safety of a homely, homogeneous group may be more likely to be comfortable for someone otherwise alone and socially isolated. Such a group may be a prerequisite for opening one's mind to people of different backgrounds, abilities, and interests, or to question received ideas of, for example, gender. As McGivney (2006: 94) put it, writing in a UK context, there is a need and argument for adult education to engage '... with people in the community, winning their trust, listening to them in order to increase the quality of their engagement'. Creating homogeneity in adult learning groups may create a spirit of acceptance and security and be a

condition for wanting to participate in the first place (Bjursell, 2019). A heterogeneous group with both men and women present may not be able to offer the necessary safe space for some men or women. That not all facets of diversity will be welcomed or accepted in a particular group may be the compromise necessary for promoting other forms of social inclusion. Varying the aspect that is homogeneous for some groups of learners (sometimes making them gendered as in Men's or Women's Shed, at other times making the group homosocial by ethnicity/race, and so on) may at times be welcome, positive, and accepting. Ironically, providing and encouraging learning through relatively homosocial groups may be one way out of the conundrum of reducing social isolation and broadening participation in and through adult community education and thereby constitute an antidote to CAD.

### **Limitations and suggestions for future research**

Our theory of conditional social equality (CSE) is based on conclusions drawn from a limited sample of Men's Sheds. As with all theories, it is a supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something, especially one based on general principles independent of the thing to be explained. While based on a rich body of field data, the studies which have led to our theory were not designed to test the theory. Rather, the theory of conditional social equality emerged from the data, mainly in Men's Sheds contexts. We anticipate future research to set up studies that explicitly test our theory. Such studies would need to select a number of social characteristics subject to research ethics guidelines—we have suggested age, gender, social class, sexual orientation, disability, and ethnicity/race – but other characteristics could also be considered, such as educational attainment or religion. If a study was conducted inclusive of Shed-based organisations it might include Sheds specifically for First Nations men, for migrant or refugee groups, for War Veterans, or with dementia. Each characteristic would need to be operationalized, and groups of learners be selected and categorized according to the chosen characteristics. The next step would be to either follow a group of learners as they engage in a course, program, or activity through an ethnographic approach, or alternatively devise a suitable interview schedule and do pre- and post-interviews with the participants. One might, for example, study mixed gender groups across the Men's Shed / Women's Shed continuum, particularly in the UK or Australia where

mixed gender Sheds are becoming more common. If doing a quantitative study, other factors such as personality or attitudinal factors need to be controlled for. While results would invariably be context dependent, it would be very interesting and useful if such studies could result in a mapping of what social characteristics are best combined to facilitate the reconsideration of other social characteristics – and vice versa, which characteristic(s), for which given group of learners, cannot be challenged if group cohesion and a safe and homely informal learning environment is to be maintained. It would be equally interesting and useful to map findings about social characteristics to characteristics of the learning environment. Other configurations of divisions that might be challenged or not challenged might be obtained from other or future studies.

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## **About the authors**

**Professor Helene Ahl**, PhD is professor of Management at Encell, the National Centre for Adult Learning at Jönköping University in Sweden. She is a well-known feminist scholar and has published widely in the fields of and gender and adult learning, motivation and adult learning, and gender and entrepreneurship.

**Joel Hedegaard**, PhD is assistant professor of Education at Encell, the National Centre for Adult Learning at Jönköping University in Sweden. His research focuses on issues of inclusion of marginalized groups in adult learning. He has studied older men's learning at Men's Sheds, and also published on learning issues for adults with high functioning autism.

**Barry Golding**, PhD is Honorary Professor of Education at Federation University in Australia. Indigenous vocational education, adult and community education, inter-sectoral transfer, men's lifelong and lifewide learning, health and wellbeing in community settings, including through community men's sheds, have become his particular, international research interest.

## **Contact details**

Email: [helene.ahl@ju.se](mailto:helene.ahl@ju.se)

Email: [joel.hedegaard@ju.se](mailto:joel.hedegaard@ju.se)

Email: [b.golding@federation.edu.au](mailto:b.golding@federation.edu.au)

**Post-school dilemmas in diminished society:  
Working-class mothers' perspectives of choices and  
realities in their communities**

Piper Rodd  
Deakin University

Kellie Sanders  
Latrobe University

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*This paper provides insight into working-class parents' views of the structural and systemic injustices shaping post-school options and opportunities in contemporary Australia, drawing on interview data with a group of mothers living in growth corridor suburbs in the outer west of Melbourne. Illustrating aspects of Berlant's (2011) notion of "cruel optimism", the paper examines the concepts of diminished society and collective community afforded by success through education, an aspiration and achievement unequal among young Australians. As Reay (2017) argues, an ideological narrative that positions individuals as being responsible for their own achievement through education sets many up to fail. This paper gives voice to the lived experiences of this individual responsibilisation. We draw on elements of Marxist analysis, a subset of critical theory, whereby economic circumstances are the basis upon which political and*

*ideological realities are built, critiquing the ways in which neoliberal social and economic policy and ideology are normalised (Tyson, 2015).*

**Keywords:** *youth, post-school pathways, social class, parenting*

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## **Introduction**

This paper explores the concept of diminished society as illustrated by the experiences of those living, working and putting their kids through school in two localised communities in outer-suburban Melbourne. It draws on research from a project that investigated local perceptions of the value and costs of post-school education and training for residents of two adjacent communities often characterised by their intersectional socio-economic disadvantage and cultural complexity. This research sought to learn from community members what factors they saw as informing the pursuit of these post-school options. The factors they described might be broadly categorised as social, geographical, economic and cultural impediments or enablers. Put another way, one of the notable themes that emerged from interviews with parents, was an awareness of distinct social class constraints, a strong belief that not all paths into, through and out of school were equal.

While the project canvassed the views of an array of community members who self-identified as having an interest in contexts of post-school training and education in the area, this paper discusses in depth the responses of only one of these participant groups, parents, or, more precisely, mothers. What these mothers described of their day-to-day lives illustrates the increasing pressures and stresses - the affective experience - of contemporary working-class life as the omnipresent backdrop of their lives, informing their ideas of what they imagined possible or achievable for their children as they exited school. Indeed, all mothers self-identified as working-class. Such a clearly stated social class positioning is notable in contemporary Australia in which traditional class distinctions have become obliterated by decades of neoliberal mythology positioning us all as an amorphous and vaguely defined middle-class (see for instance, Threadgold & Gerrard 2022; Paternoster 2017; Sheppard & Biddle 2017). Describing her frustration with the government, for example, one mother explained, “working-

class people get squat...sometimes I think I'd be better off unemployed” (Anne) while another stated, “working-class people get forgotten” (Karen). An awareness of social inequality and the lived experience of its injustice is articulated powerfully by both these mothers.

This paper positions this data within a socio-political context of neoliberal policy and practice in relation to post-school education and training, arguing collective responsibility for young people’s futures has been eroded. It uses critical social inquiry to, “confront injustices in a particular society or public sphere within the society” (Down et al 2018: 7). We argue that, while imperative to all socio-economic and cultural development and growth in a society like Australia, education cannot compensate for a lack of society. As Reay (2017: 11) contends, in the contemporary anglosphere of the western world, we have an education system “enmeshed in, and increasingly driven by, the economy, rather than one...capable of redressing economic inequalities.” In this context, young people must learn to function within the economy, to transact their education in a saleable way, surviving in a society of limiting and limited opportunity. The problem, this research found, is not young people lacking aspiration or sufficient personal motivation to become entrepreneurial, but rather families feeling such a heavy weight of financial pressure and social expectation in their day-to-day lives that big aspirations, including those for post-school higher education and training, are constrained, consigned to the too-hard basket of the future imaginary.

Where in the past, the pursuit and attainment of post-school education, training and qualifications were deemed an investment in a more financially prosperous or secure future, this research found that there was a distinct lack of belief that such investments might “pay off” in the long-term. When surviving is at the forefront of your mind, aspiring becomes a fanciful luxury. Indeed, as many have argued, the neoliberal language around individual choice and aspiration presupposes problematically that a level playing field exists from which all young people decide what to do with their post-school lives (see Gale & Parker 2014; Zipin et al. 2015). Zipin et al (2015: 229) characterise this as a “landscape of declining opportunity”, especially for those on the socio-economic fringes of society, giving rise to an impulse by policymakers to invoke an often superficial language and policy direction aimed at

achieving “equity” through increasing educational attainment. Young people’s choices about education and training are “embedded in different kinds of biographies and different opportunity structures” linked closely to classed positions (France and Roberts 2017: 50-51). The limiting factor, circumscribing these young people’s pursuit of post-school education and training, is a labour market and school system not only ill-equipped for, and stubbornly unresponsive to, the harsh conditions of decades of globalisation and neoliberal politics, but often responsible for perpetuating these inequities.

This paper draws on critical theory as a liberating influence (Bohman, 2021), aiming to explain and transform circumstances that enable domination and constrain freedom. As a theoretical framework for social inquiry, critical theory has enabled us to draw on the primary source ethnographic interview data and illuminate the lived experiences of the invisible forces of social class and neoliberalism which influence, directly and indirectly, post-school choices and opportunities for working-class young people. More specifically, we draw on elements of Marxist analysis, a subset of critical theory, whereby economic circumstances form the basis upon which social, political and ideological realities are built (Tyson, 2015). In doing so, we critique the ways in which neoliberal social and economic policy and ideology are normalised. Marxist theory reminds us that we are 'programmed' by these ideologies, whereby modes of power are normalised to the extent that those who subscribe to them perceive them as natural ways of being and doing (Tyson, 2015). Indeed, as we draw on Marxist analysis, we bring the material and historical circumstances of these mothers' lives to the centre of our discussions, interrogating as we do the implications and the ways in which they enable and constrain perceived post-school choices of young people, and impact the realities of their lives. The utility of this approach is in helping to elucidate aspects of these mothers' reported lived experiences and perspectives, positioning them within the broader socio-cultural context of a society offering diminished opportunity and rewards for their children. This analysis is, therefore, posited in terms of Marxist theory, conjuring the now infamous neoliberal maxim that there is no society, only individuals and families. We do so to actively resist these oppressive structures, allowing for alternative visions of what ought or might be, to emerge from the pragmatics of oppressive structural and systemic injustice that shapes life choices and realities.

In this paper, we first provide a brief overview of the relevant literature on social class and the factors that impact post-school choices and pathways, then present the communities as significant identities, arguing that place plays an important role in shaping ideas and choices, cultivating a sense of what is real and what might be possible. We then discuss the interview data, describing and contextualising the ideas, thoughts and reflections shared by the mothers as they responded to a series of questions about post-school options and preferences for their children. This analysis is structured around the key themes that emerged, the socio-cultural broader concepts that shaped both the discussion we had and informed the perceptions they expressed. The paper concludes by drawing together the threads of this discussion, arguing that the utility in contextualising these women's experiences and opinions lies in part in humanising issues often abstracted into the socio-political realm of the impersonal public narrative, through which people are often depicted as abstracted statistics.

### **Literature review – On class, neoliberalism, choice and the realities of diminished imagination**

Enhancing individual credentials and qualifications, and increasing personal skills, cannot change the structure of the labour market. This is, posit France and Roberts (2017), the flaw with the rhetoric around the "learning society", presupposing that entrenched structural and systemic issues, including those to do with class and opportunity, can be nullified by individual action alone. Zipin et al (2015: 230) describes the false promise of the "massification" of qualification attainment as failing to correspondingly massify gainful employment opportunities, instead generating "too many people with educational credentials for jobs which become correspondingly more competitive and difficult to secure". Wilson (2017: 117-118) describes this as part of the "hustle" we all must engage in not only to ensure we receive a pay cheque but to "care for each other in an increasingly insecure and unstable world." While the hustle is universal, transcending lines of race, class and gender, Wilson (2017) argues that the most consistent result of this pressure is the social dislocation it engenders, though it is not experienced in equal or equitable ways. Similarly, Giroux (2014: 10) argues that the cultural narratives of contemporary societies no longer "speak of justice, equality, liberty and democracy" but instead disable collective



imagination. Progress is no longer believed possible and the constraints of just getting by, of the hustle, predominate. This is, Giroux (2014) argues, the violence of organised forgetting, orchestrated intentionally by those who benefit from neoliberalism. Reay articulates the pressure increasingly felt by individuals to take responsibility for their own educational achievement, especially unjust for those denied access to an equitable share of opportunity.

*Recent governments...have viewed creating aspiring students as more effective and clearly cheaper than putting money into education... (positioning) the working classes as responsible for their own educational success without providing them with the resources to make that success possible. (Reay 2017: 102)*

Neoliberalism presents a seductive mythology, nullifying our imaginations and hopes that things might be otherwise. We are positioned, as Reay (2017) describes, as responsible for realising our own potential, agentic, in the pursuit and achievement of our own goals. So intent is the neoliberal project on engendering coercive personal responsibility in its citizens, that “the self-actualised and self-managing individual is central to such neoliberal visions” (Trnka & Trundle 2014: 139).

Neoliberalism is a type of capitalism, a set of economic policies and supporting ideas (Connell 2013b) that privatises profit while socialising debt. The casualisation of work offers a useful illustration of this concept, Dawson and Hetherington (2018: 19) explaining, “casualisation...transfers risk from downturns in business from the employer to the employee and it reduces the bargaining power of workers.” Relations of care are broken through mechanisms that disintegrate dynamics of reciprocity. The notion of the social good has been marginalised, a buried discourse replaced only by the rhetoric of neoliberalism, a language of individual rights, economic efficiency and choice. Equality, under neoliberalism, is not something that should be guaranteed by the state or common principle. It is something that we must earn, or more precisely win, through competition. Put a little differently, neoliberalism has us competing for equality in the market (Wilson 2017: 56).

The process of voiding the collective memory that things might be otherwise is made complete by the discourse of rationality. Education

is seen as an investment, “since the benefits of the education and training accrued to the individual alone...the individual should bear (all) the costs of this training” (Welch 1997: 8). Our capacity to imagine a community premised on collective, shared wealth and wellbeing has been subsumed by a narrowing vision looking only towards individual consumerism. The “do what you love” (DWYL) philosophy so prominently promoted to young people, argue Down et al (2018), is a product of the neoliberal idea of self-responsibility, seductive enticement to aspiration and agency, that fails to account for the exercise of democratic choice now being exclusionary, available in reality only to those with the “right educational credentials, and the financial and networking resources required to enable the choice” (Down et al 2018: 54). Engendering the myth-belief that opportunity is equal and universal promotes delusional thinking. Berlant (2011) terms this widespread social phenomenon “cruel optimism”, arguing that the effect of neoliberal policies is far-reaching and varied. She describes the dimensions of the “set of dissolving assurances” in the realms of, “upward mobility, job security, political and social equality” (Berlant, 2011: 3).

In September 2018, the Australian Senate tabled an inquiry into the future of work and workers (Commonwealth of Australia 2018). It describes the changed nature of society for young Australian workers, noting that “for the first time in history, the wealth accumulation trajectory of the generation of workers entering employment is well below that of their predecessors at comparable ages” (Commonwealth of Australia 2018: 14). It describes young people facing high levels of under-employment, casualised employment and working in positions for which they are over-qualified, documenting young Australians facing a range of exclusionary barriers to entering secure employment (Commonwealth of Australia 2018: 16). Social mobility in Australia is second worst in the OECD, despite the rhetoric representing Australia as a country in which everyone gets a “fair go” the evidence suggests otherwise. Children of families at the bottom of the income ladder have little chance of moving up the class ladder, with only 12% of children of manual workers becoming managers (ACTU 2019: 24). Young people in Australia today face the most insecure working conditions of any demographic group in the country and “the erosion of the standard employment relationship has been experienced most directly, and

most painfully, by young workers” (Carney & Stanford 2018: 16). While Australia enjoys one of the highest rates of post-school education and training attainment in the developed world (approximately 50% of 25–34-year-olds holding some qualification) they must contend with the prevalence of insecure work, unprotected by the traditional arrangements.

Stanford (2018) documents the redistribution of money in the Australian economy, citing globalisation and neoliberalism as significant factors precipitating this decline in what he terms the labour share of the country's wealth (GDP). He identifies four key trends as symbolising this decline in labour share, including the expansion of “non-standard and precarious employment”, a steep decline in trade union density, the erosion of minimum wage policy and the restructuring of Australia's unique awards system (Stanford 2018: 29). The ACTU (2021) indicates that Australia has one of the highest rates of insecure, casual and precarious work in the developed world. It is in this socio-economic climate that young Australians enter the job market post-school. Such a view helps us to make sense of the perspectives offered by these parents.

## **Methodology**

With “non-standard and precarious employment” (Stanford 2018: 29) and steadily declining social mobility nationally (ACTU 2019: 24) becoming increasingly normalised in ways that position such trajectories acceptable, unquestioned and legitimated, this research sought to explore the ways in which various stakeholders within two communities perceived, experienced, and navigated post-school choices, and their absences. The research this paper is based on is drawn from a broader project that developed two sources of data; anonymous electronic surveys and focus groups with four respondent groups - local employers, teachers, parents and young people - within the two neighbouring communities over a period of approximately two months. Ethics was approved by the supporting institution, as well as by the Victorian State Government Department of Education and Training. The research project was widely advertised by the commissioning organisation, which has extensive contacts with individuals, organisations and schools within the communities. Survey links were distributed through these organisations. In addition, simplified versions of the plain language statements were disseminated on social media informing

prospective participants about the project and inviting them to contact the researchers. All surveys had unique hyperlinks, allowing relatively easy distribution to those wishing to participate. Participants were also invited to take part in focus groups through these channels. In all cases these were done with informed consent, participants were provided with plain language statements outlining the nature of the research, agreeing any resulting publications based on their contribution would be anonymised.

It must be acknowledged that those who replied to the survey and agreed to participate in focus groups may have self-selected based on a pre-existing interest in, and possibly knowledge of, the specified subject matter. For instance, many of those who completed the surveys had a relatively high degree of experience with VET in some capacity as well as some familiarity with the sponsoring community organisation. It is, therefore, important to acknowledge this potential bias towards those already pre-disposed towards vocational education and training or with a preference to VET over, for example, university education. These issues will be explored in more detail in the analysis and discussion of the data.

The surveys asked those who either resided or worked within either of the two communities a range of questions about the post-school options for young people, the value of VET and university education and the role of governments in the provision of such services. While the questions focused broadly on perceptions of post-school pathways and opportunities, this paper's analysis will concentrate on the responses to open-ended questions asked in semi-structured interviews with parents during which respondents' views of the value of post-school education and training were canvassed. To anonymise respondents' identities, each is referred to by a pseudonym. Questions were open-ended and of a general nature, allowing participants to respond in ways in which they felt comfortable. Where sensitive issues might have emerged, such as in relation to various life stressors, interviewers were careful not to probe deeply but rather allow participants to speak to the extent they were comfortable to do so, and to redirect lines of questioning to a more general nature where necessary. All participants were offered details of support organisations and helplines as a matter of process.

Critical Marxist theory was considered when drafting the open-ended

focus group questions, inviting participants to reflect on their lived experiences and represent their views. Lived experience in qualitative research seeks to represent and understand participants' experiences, choices and options (Given, 2008), and their absence, speaking to the personal and unique ways in which experiences are influenced by subjective factors including, but not limited to, identity encompassing variations of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, political associations, and the varied roles and characteristics that impact how individuals live their daily lives (ibid). Following this premise, questions were developed which pursued participants' experiences with post-school choices and how they lived through and responded to these, providing opportunities not to critique individual lives, but to explore the distinctions between lives and experiences to understand why some experiences might be privileged over other (ibid). Questions about how parents viewed and prioritised the value of VET and university education in contemporary Australia are included in this data set, as are questions about the broader socio-political and economic issues that might impact these perceptions and shape the relative notion of choice in thinking about post-school education and training. These broader contextual questions and answers helped to inform a more nuanced understanding of what the influences were on these expressed preferences, and an idea of how these parents viewed their world, and the political influences that shaped their kids' lives became clear. Thus, a Marxist analysis, this paper focuses on the production and reproduction of the opportunities and perceptions of post-school education and training through the lens of a particular demographic; anglo-celtic Australian, English-speaking, working-class mothers in these two communities. This contribution to the field gives voice to the lived experiences of mothers, an insight into what it means to be a working-class mother, the affective responses to the cruel optimism of a society with decreasing social mobility, the tensions of which were evidenced by these parents.

Respondents to both the survey and focus group interviews were asked questions about their personal demographic background, such as education level, job type and whether they worked as well as lived in the communities being studied. Participants were also asked about their place of birth and linguistic background (if they spoke a language other than English). While overall, respondents to both forms of data collection were mainly Australian-born and predominantly English-

speaking, survey participant parents were more representative of the diverse communities in which they lived than the mothers who chose to participate in the focus group interview. Although cultural and ethnic diversity is significant in the Australian context and a key demographic that might influence post-school choices, the self-selecting nature of the methodology meant that, although unintended and in line with ethics approval, focus groups were only able to be undertaken with those who volunteered.

Although these parents were all mothers, gender being a consistent factor in those who also responded to the survey, these women who took part in the focus group had either no formal post-school education or limited vocational training qualifications and worked in industries and roles for which they were not well remunerated. They described working in low-level administration jobs and other roles typically referred to - and remunerated - as low or unskilled. Their personal experiences of navigating the tough realities of financial and familial responsibilities came through strongly throughout the discussion, informing their aspirations for their children.

Economic pressures shaped their views on what was and what might be possible, recognising that such experiences of financial pressure were not evenly shared in our society. It is this broader awareness which is of significance to this paper, and something that participants were aware of: choices, simply, were, they all agreed, mitigated by one's access to capital. For example, the desire for steady, paid work was the overriding concern amongst them all with a preference for skilled trades over jobs that required many years of higher education.

Data was analysed drawing on elements of Marxist analysis, a subset of critical theory, whereby economic circumstances are the basis upon which social, political and ideological realities are built (Tyson, 2015), and whereby economic power is simultaneously social and political power (ibid). Thus, this research drew on critical thematic analysis whereby the researchers reviewed the transcripts, identifying key themes in line with the research questions and through a Marxist lens seeking to draw links between the everyday lived experiences of participants and the broader social, economic, and political context into which they were lived out. The analysis that follows, first introduces and gives context to the two communities, drawing on participants'

voices themselves, followed by expanding on the key themes of cost-of-living pressures, diminished collective society, the importance of community, the commodification of education and the adverse effects of neoliberalism on wellbeing.

## **The Communities**

The western suburbs in almost all eastern state capital cities of Australia have a long-standing historical reputation for being comparatively undesirable places for the aspirational middle class to live and work. These communities were selected for this research because of the deficit, class-based cultural cringe that has persisted despite recent incursions extending the west as the city grows to accommodate its five million plus people, through deliberate planning initiatives along growth corridors (State Government Victoria, 2012). This perceived east-west cultural bias and division was reflected by the participants, who spoke of feeling that living in the West carried with it an inherent stigma, understood as implicitly connected to social class and opportunity.

*“All the good stuff is on the other side of town...we don't really have any TAFEs or unis” (in the west)*

*“Ah, the Bronx!” (reaction from Easterners when they learn you live in the West)*

*“They've (the eastern suburbs) got the stuff (crime) too but they pick on us the most” (Karen)*

The City of Brimbank is located in the north-western suburbs of Melbourne. City of Melton is the next council area further west. The City of Melton, at 527 square kms, is considerably larger, geographically, than the City of Brimbank at 123.4km, while the population is comparable in size, 181,000 and 196,000 respectively, and encompass 18 suburbs. This section gives a sense of both the 'average' and complexities of these council areas relative to socio-economic and educational disadvantage and the variance of this within each council

area, measured by SEIFA data<sup>1</sup>. In the City of Melton, the average SEIFA level is 981, compared to the Greater Melbourne average of 1,026. Within the City of Melton, however, dis/advantage varies from 852 in one suburb to 1,087 in another. Similarly, the City of Brimbank averages a level of 930, whilst extending from a score of 852, significantly disadvantaged, to 1,064, relatively advantaged in some pockets. Both council areas reflect significant levels of disadvantage, with some areas experiencing profound disadvantage. The 'Dropping off the Edge 2021 Report' examines complex disadvantages in communities throughout Australia, measuring 37 indicators across every community (Tanton et al. 2021) painting a picture of where "disadvantage is concentrated... forms of disadvantage overlap and...multilayered disadvantage becomes difficult to escape, with some communities experiencing persistent disadvantage over many years" (Tanton et al. 2021: 8). In the Brimbank and Melton council areas, most suburbs are within the first or second quintile, reflecting the most and second most disadvantaged levels in the country. At best, several suburbs are ranked in the third quintile. Indeed, such a pattern is replicated across the bulk of the western suburbs, relative to the eastern suburbs, the data reflecting multiple, persistent and deep disadvantages, in the west relative to the east of Melbourne. Patterns of education reflect far higher rates of low educational attainment (<year 11) than average. Trade qualifications range within the council areas, with an overall average to slightly above average attainment. The numbers of those attending TAFE similarly vary, similar to the average, while university qualifications and attainment are significantly lower than national and Melbourne CBD averages.

### **"The cost of living...it's just too hard."**

Zipin et al (2015: 232) argue that in research about post-school opportunities and preferences, social conditioning and cultural expectations engender responses about the need to aspire towards upward mobility "by means of a meritocratic principle of hard work." This, they contend, is evident when research is done into low-SES

<sup>1</sup> In Australia, the SEIFA index of dis/advantage measures the relative economic dis/advantage of communities based on ABS data including income, educational attainment, un/employment, jobs in relatively un/skilled occupations and other variables that broadly reflect disadvantage (Profile id. n.d.c). A lower score reflects a greater disadvantage, while a higher score reflects less disadvantage (i.e. greater socio-economic advantage) and is measured against the average population-weighted level of dis/advantage in Australia, positioned as 1000 (ibid).



communities. The apparent need to aspire to higher education and career trajectory goals is seen as the "right" thing to say, especially when being interviewed by researchers with higher degrees. However, this research found that responses varied, with the mothers expressing ambivalence about investing too much in higher education, instead explaining, "I prefer (a) trade...because office jobs, everything goes offshore." (Anne) Indeed, in focus group conversations with these mothers, discussions were frank. Mothers were direct and seemed grateful to have a forum in which to connect with other parents who 1. held similar views regarding schooling and post-school options, and 2. were similarly disenfranchised or disillusioned by schools, the limitations of education and any trust in 'the system' or society to provide viable employment options and adequate economic security for their children.

The following section analyses the data from focus groups with these mothers under the interrelated themes of commodification of education, adversity and wellbeing, post-school choices, lost hope and lack of trust surrounding what we argue represents a broken social contract. This discussion is contextualised by an exploration of the theoretical underpinnings of these themes, significant because it enables us to connect isolated anecdotes and views of parents. We map them together to demonstrate a broader phenomenon in which at least some families in these communities are living and experiencing but which we suggest is far more broadly applicable in contemporary Australia as we explore the complex intersections of class, education and post-school options in an increasingly unequal neoliberal society.

### **The commodification of education**

Although all the parents described struggling with financial pressures – "Our wages don't (go up)" (Karen); "Two parents have to work" (Sarah) – they all chose to send their children to schools outside the (free) government system. As one mum explained, this was because "you expect more when you pay the money." (Sarah) Others agreed with this sentiment. The theme of the omnipresent strain of financial pressures felt by these parents re-emerged throughout the interview. This, for instance, was how one mother described the pressure of putting her kids through the local Catholic school: "Four kids, it's twenty grand a year, we've had to sell our house, mental breakdowns, I have a husband that's

just...basically I'm like a single mum where I have four kids and him and I find, why am I doing all this?" (Karen) The layers of challenge here are notable. Due to a lack of trust in the capacity of local government schools to provide adequate education for their children, these mothers had imposed on themselves a financial pressure that caused inordinate stress.

However, when asked if the expectation was being met by the private schools, the answer was negative, and a good deal of time was spent criticising teachers and schools for perceived inadequacies. "Teachers don't want to work...I complained about teachers (at my child's school)" (Sarah). Implicit in this explanation is a trust in the unspoken contract of capitalism that suggests if a commodity (good or service – like school education or shoes) costs more, it will be of higher quality, and you'll achieve better outcomes: "You expect more when you pay the money." Sarah describes struggling with debt to pay school fees at the school she sent her four kids to, indeed all three mothers sent their children to low-cost private schools and all expressed feelings of having been let down, with little trust in the efficacy of the education system to provide the outcome they thought they were buying for their children (a secure pathway into adulthood). School education appears to be viewed as a transactable commodity to be bought, sold and the final products traded in the "free market" (see, for example, Connell, 2013a; Connell, 2013b). However, this financial cost imperative, the literal cost of doing the best thing for your children, increases the pressure on already stretched household resources and these parents worried about the length of time, and thus growing cost, that schooling now takes.

### **Neoliberalism, adversity and wellbeing**

The high cost of living and the toll it takes on a family's cohesion and mental health was consistently raised against the premise that "Our wages don't go up" (Karen). Indeed, the cost of living is going up and "real wages" are going down (Jericho, 2022), a pressure disproportionately impacting lower-income households, an increasingly significant issue in Australia as we write this, a situation dramatically exacerbated in the months since this data was collected.

*The cost of living, we've just had to downsize because it was just killing me, the cost of electricity, how are kids supposed to cope*

*with \$800 electricity bills, cause that's what I get...it's just too hard. You can see why so many people in society get depression, and I fell in that trap at one point because, you know they keep putting, you know we get nothing from the government. (Karen)*

Karen explained, "things are a lot less secure. Kids these days, they have to do something after year twelve whereas it used to be year 9 or 10." Sarah agreed, stating that it was "unfortunate", that kids now had to finish year 12. Anne contextualised what she viewed as a generational shift, describing that, "when we were their age, it was a lot more secure. I went straight from year 12 into a job." Ultimately these mothers shared the sentiment "You want more (for your kids). You don't want them to struggle like you did...it's a lot harder for kids these days...if we don't help them, who's going to?" (Sarah).

The parents were asked if they worried about their children being able to buy a house in the future, traditionally the marker of economic security and the Great Australian Dream (Maclennan et al. 2021), after emphatically stating that they felt opportunities were more precarious for the young generation. Anne replied, "I do. I say to my kids, don't end up like me, a single mum in administration. You need to get a job where...you're happy...a job that will help pay the bills and enable you to go on a holiday or you know have the little bit of finer things in life...I don't think my kids are ever going to move out...you want a job that you know is not going to go offshore that's a little bit more secure." Karen agreed, explaining that when she was young, "I went straight from year 12 into a finance job...but I don't see that happening today... Year 12 is the bare minimum." These mothers speak to a time, prior to the 1980s, when young people from low SES communities could trust in a reasonable life trajectory that was not primarily reliant upon success in school (Zipin et al 2015: 242). Indeed, until the 1970s large numbers of people across industrialised nations left school at 15 or 16, moving seamlessly into employment, while the relatively privileged few continued with school or college and, even fewer, went on to university (France & Roberts 2017: 40). Participation in some form of post-compulsory school education has since become normalised (France & Roberts 2017: 40), the reality these mothers describe. Simultaneously, as noted by the neoliberal imperative, individuals are responsible for their own educational and employment circumstances (Zipin et al 2015; France & Roberts 2017: 41).

Although the mothers were concerned for the future of their children, there was also a strong sense that there was cause to be concerned at present. As one mother explained that her family accessed “government services which are free”, the conversation turned to mental health services, which all participants had accessed for their kids. This fact alone is striking: every parent had the need to access mental health services for their children. Here, mothers spoke positively of services: “The services that are being offered to kids that aren’t coping are amazing. My daughter was bullied...and tried to kill herself. If it wasn’t for the government and Headspace, I don’t know what I would have done.” (Anne) Sarah refers to going through the “same thing”, her child having had “three goes” [attempts at suicide], agreeing that Headspace was invaluable. All believed the community needs more of these services, Anne describing the difficulties she had accessing affordable services for her husband. “I tried to get help but the only help I can get is if I pay a hundred and something dollars concession, I don’t have that.” Karen concurred, pointing out the tough choices you had to make in accessing expensive services, describing them as a challenge to access “unless you have money, and you do it for your kids first, yeah?” Significantly here, the conflation between financial pressure on families, children’s (perceived) insecure futures and well-being was notable amongst these mothers who reflected on the mental health impacts for themselves and their children. Tellingly, recent research looking at the conflation of health, work and income in Australia provides stark confirmation of the very direct link between mental health and well-being, and income and disadvantage (de Leeuw et al 2021). Indeed, the authors conclude:

*There is a clear gradient with the incidence of mental health conditions increasing for those whose equivalised household incomes are in the lowest four groups of the income distribution and those who live in the lowest five groups of SEIFA, in geographic areas of relative disadvantage compared with advantage (de Leeuw et al., 2021, p. 22).*

## **Post-school choices**

When asked about the influence shaping their perceptions about the value of post-school education and training options, responses were

varied. They all agreed it was beneficial to have VET and university options close by where their families lived. The overarching sense that staying local mattered in all things was a consistent theme throughout our discussion. Indeed, all the mums said they'd like to see more TAFE or private VET colleges in their communities, while they were less enthusiastic when asked if it'd be useful to have more university campuses nearby. In terms of a future for their children, all spoke of trades, none felt comfortable talking about university as a realistic option for their kids, nor did they mention careers for their kids involving university education. All agreed that the cost of going to university was prohibitive for working-class families. For Karen, there was a sense of security that came with a trade:

*I prefer a trade...because I think office jobs...everything goes offshore... technology just eliminates a lot of the jobs, so I prefer him to do a trade ...I want a job that's secure.*

While for both Sarah and Anne, what their children were "capable of" and what they enjoyed was important.

*With mine, a trade is better for him than being a lawyer or whatever...at the end of the day it's what he's capable of. (Sarah)*

*I'm not fussed, I tell him it's what you enjoy doing, if you enjoy cake making or if you enjoy a trade...he could be a cleaner or a gardener as long as he's happy and working and he's an honest man...I'm proud. (Anne)*

Such positions invoke a sense of cognitive dissonance and contradictions for these mothers. For instance, if it is up to the young person and what they are capable of, then why distrust government schools? If there is an emphasis on what makes them happy, why the fear of insecurity? And yet, the overwhelming fear, it seemed, was that their children wouldn't be able to afford to buy a house. This notable recurrent theme is seemingly the end goal of all schooling, post-school education, and employment. Such a measure reflects what Berlant (2011) refers to as "cruel optimism". Like post-school employment options, the circumstances around home ownership in Australia have shifted, and the myth of home ownership as widespread, equalising and secure (Arundel & Ronald, 2021: 1123) undermined. The "Australian Dream", prominent in Australia's popular imagination for decades (MacLennan et

al. 2021) has come undone for many, as property prices have continued to exceed wage growth.

Individualism is a dominant social value in Australia manifest in the concomitant obsession with personal home ownership, underpinned by the faith in social mobility (Maclennan et al. 2021). The aspiration, therefore, for these mothers is a perception of financial security for their children, a freedom from the burden of the pressures and associated mental health impact of the economic fragility, and indeed liberation from the neoliberal project of scarcity. The aspiration of home ownership and the attendant financial security, however, is increasingly mythological, "detached from the reality of contemporary housing market developments" with empirical data pointing to declining access to home ownership across income and age groups, and worsening inequalities (Arundel & Ronald, 2021, p. 1136), another example of the cruelty of optimism and an operating feature of neoliberalism whereby commodification functions through perpetuating exclusion (Connell, 2013b).

### **Lost hope and lack of trust: The social contract**

For these mothers, there was a distinct sense of multiple tensions held simultaneously, some contradictory and some seemingly insurmountable, a lack of hope for the financial stability and therefore general well-being for their children, perhaps a projection of their own lack of financial stability and precarious wellbeing. The lack of trust in the system to provide adequate social welfare was a key issue, while simultaneously, where the system did provide schooling at low costs, these mothers didn't trust that this would be adequate to educate their children and instead chose to pay thousands of dollars a year on school fees for each child. This contradiction is stark.

Here we have mothers reflecting that while they placed their investments in education as the hope for their children's future, such investment has not paid off, and they are left without hope for their children's future, or further engaging in cruel optimism. Sarah's emphatic assertions that "if we don't help them, who's going to help them", sums up the general lack of trust in the social contract, while Anne described a gaping hole in the provision of a societal safety net: "That gap's too big and a lot of kids are slipping through the system." All

parents were asked if they felt confident in the government to provide the services the communities needed. All replied that they had no confidence in any level of government. When asked if they were aware of who the relevant government representatives in their communities were, all replied they did not. This critical position of the government's abdication of responsibility to them and their communities dovetailed with the perception of the rising cost of living. For example, Anne described the privatising of essential services as indicative: "If they (the government) didn't sell everything and kept...the electricity and things here...They don't care about...us. The prices go up every year, we can't cope."

A recurrent lament through the discussion was the pressure on parents to help their kids (financially, emotionally etc.) without systems in society to support them, the responsibility falling onto the individual. When asked what they thought of the local council? "I hate the council... they just take our money, that's about it" (Karen). When asked whose responsibility the provision of public services related to education and training for their kids was, they replied it was the state government. However, it was clear in the elaboration on this answer they instead felt a great deal of pressure to personally compensate for the government's insufficient service provision. This theme of personal responsibility recurred throughout the discussion. The closely related concept of the diminished welfare system for the working class also emerged, summed up in these comments:

*It is our responsibility to provide for our kids...but you know when it is too hard for you to pay for it, they give everything to the health care card people and the workers...are not better off, and they get left with nothing and you've got nowhere to turn to, so I think there is a huge gap. (Anne)*

*I asked for some help with something at (child's school) and they said, oh, you don't have a healthcare card we can't help you...I'm worse off than these people. (Sarah)*

The provision for a health care card in Australia is limited to those on extremely limited and low incomes, most often to those reliant on welfare payments, providing an income below the poverty line, offering discounted costs for health care, including doctors, specialists and

medications. It is used as a barometer of other concession measures, such as water, gas and electricity, car registration, TAFE fees, recreation facilities (such as public swimming pools) and public transport. For these mothers, while their incomes and family circumstances did not warrant a health care card, the economic pressures permeated every aspect of their lives, exacerbating challenges to well-being and engendering a sense that the future was, in all ways, precarious. This feeling of uncertainty seemed to play a cumulative role, compounding their own anxiety around wellbeing, exacerbated by the sense that society - government and council - had abandoned them.

## **Conclusion**

Under neoliberalism, individuals must take responsibility for their present and future, becoming self-actualising lifelong learners and entrepreneurs, navigating their own achievement of well-being, lest they have only themselves to blame for perceived "wasted lives" (Zipin et al 2015: 229). Considering the demographics of these mothers' communities, their descriptions of their circumstances that inform their views of post-school choices and realities, we reflect on what Zipin et al (2015) refer to difficult times as "lived conditions fraught with structural obstacles that thwart even the most reasonable strategies for pursuing futures hopefully" (Zipin et al. 2015: 228). Cruel optimism, as coined by Berlant (2011) and adopted by Zipin et al (2015), refers to the notion that feeling hopeful in the face of such conditions seems futile and punishing. This idea usefully describes the feelings expressed by the mothers interviewed in this study, who, universally, spoke of their acute anxieties around the precarious futures of their children as they exited the school system. Indeed, the overwhelming consistency these women expressed, contextualised in terms of a fundamental distrust of the state to provide and take care of these young people, is notable.

What has been witnessed over years and decades in many advanced economies, including Australia, has been a retreat from an understanding of education as something of personal and social worth towards a definition of education in instrumentalist economic terms. Down et al (2018) suggest that the myth-notion popularly peddled to young people that education is a magic formula for securing a job, is a potentially damaging illusion, positioning the individual as an all-powerful consumer-fixer of the social and economic inequities



inherent in a society of grossly uneven opportunity. Deeming and Smyth (2014) argue that neoliberalism heralded not incremental change to the Australian welfare state but rapid and radical reconfiguration. Education, they contend, is at the vanguard of the social investment approach to social policy. Eviscerated society (is) one that is stripped of the thick mesh of mutual obligations and social responsibilities characteristics of civil society demonstrating a lack of democratic imagination.

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## **About the authors**

**Dr. Piper Rodd** is a Lecturer in the School of Education. She teaches about the sociology, history and public policy of education mostly in an Australian context. A former secondary school history, humanities and English teacher, she has also worked in the TAFE sector and continues to have a research interest in the VET sector. Her other research interests focus on social class, critical pedagogy and education in contemporary Australian society, especially around pathways through and beyond formal schooling, having worked in communities and with schools around transitions into secondary school, looking at developing a holistic community-based approach to supporting student progression.

**Dr Kellie Sanders** completed her doctorate, *Picturing Footballing Bodies: Gender, Homosociality and Sportscares*, drawing on a visual methodology and exploring the intersections of gender, power, sociality and sexuality within a women's Australian Rules football team. A Lecturer in the School of Education, LaTrobe University, Kellie continues to engage in research in the sociology of sports and education with particular interests in women's Australian Rules football, social justice, queer theory, sportscares and affect.

## **Contact details**

Email: [piper.r@deakin.edu.au](mailto:piper.r@deakin.edu.au)

Email: [k.sanders@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:k.sanders@latrobe.edu.au)

## **Doing and supervising China studies PhD projects in Australia: Experiences of Chinese PhD students and Australian supervisors**

Jian Xu  
Deakin University

Wai-wan Vivien Chan  
South China University of Technology

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*The article examines the experiences of Chinese PhD students doing research in China Studies as well as the experiences of their supervisors who supervise their research in Australian universities. By conducting semi-structured interviews with both PhD students and their supervisors, we aim to understand the expectations, concerns and challenges of both students and supervisors involved in the PhD journey. We found that the main concerns and challenges of students lie in the tight timeframe of scholarship, their 'ideological dissonance' and their relations with supervisors. The supervisors hope their Chinese students could improve academic writing skills, critical thinking skills and social skills in order to well accommodate the research culture in Australia and successfully complete their PhD research. Our findings could help Australian universities to better understand the cultural and educational challenges of Chinese PhD students and to further build up the quality for research training*

*to attract more international research students from China and elsewhere.*

**Keywords:** *Chinese international students, Australian higher education, China studies, PhD supervision*

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## **Introduction**

According to statistics released by the Department of Education and Department of Employment and Workplace Relations in Australia in April 2022, 28% of the total 465,811 international students studying in Australia came from China. Though the COVID-19 and geopolitical tensions between Australia and China in the last few years have seen a small decline in numbers, China is still the nation that sends most students to Australia, followed by India at 16% (International Education Data and Research, 2022). In recent years, Chinese international students have become a focus of media coverage in Australia. From contract cheating scandals at universities (Belot, 2016), Chinese student protests against their teachers' open discussion of contentious issues relating to China (Reynolds, 2017), to China warning students to avoid Australia for study (Kuo, 2020), media reports on this cohort of overseas students have provoked heated debate in Australia about how to respond to China's influence in Australian universities (Benney, 2017) and whether Australian universities are too reliant on income from China (Bolton, 2018).

Rather than discussing the escalating tensions over Chinese international students in Australia, the article focuses on a very specific cohort of Chinese international students – PhD students, who come to Australia from China to pursue their doctoral degree in humanities and social sciences and conduct research on China studies projects<sup>1</sup>. It aims to understand the motives, expectations, challenges and problems of overseas PRC PhD students doing research about their home country, as well as of the supervisors with China expertise, both ethnic Chinese

1 China studies projects in this article refer to research topics that mainly investigate Chinese issues from a wide range of disciplines in humanities and social sciences, such as media studies, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, political science and so on. PhD students working on these projects are based in various schools or research centres not limited to a China Studies Centre or a Department of Chinese Studies.

and non-Chinese, who supervise such projects. Understanding these individual experiences that may have only been shared with a small circle of friends, and even not shared unreservedly between students and supervisors, will help promote mutual understanding between Chinese PhD students and their Australian supervisors. Furthermore, it will enhance the quality of international research student experiences in Australian universities in the fields of China studies and area studies.

In order to understand individual research and supervision experiences, we conducted semi-structured interviews in early 2018 with 6 PhD students (4 ongoing and 2 completed) and 4 supervisors (2 ethnic Chinese supervisors and 2 non-Chinese supervisors) in Australian universities. Their research areas cover a wide range of fields about China, such as Chinese politics, media, arts, gender, history and literature. The interviews were conducted either face-to-face, via email or WeChat voice call and were based on two sets of interview questions for students and supervisors respectively (see Appendices 1 and 2). The face-to-face and WeChat interviews were of 30 minutes to an hour's duration and were conducted in Chinese. The email interviews were conducted in English. Though conducted in different languages, interview questions in each cohort were identical. The names of participants, their research projects, specific research interests and working institutions have been anonymised. The questions for both students and supervisors covered a wide range of issues including, among others, the political orientation of research topics, fieldwork in China, student-supervisor relations, and career expectations, to better understand their research and supervision experiences.

### **Students' experiences**

The 13 questions for PhD students encompass four themes: research environment (Q1, 2, 9), experiences in conducting PhD research (Q3, 5, 6, 7, 8), relations with supervisors (Q4, 10, 11), self-evaluation and career expectations (Q 12, 13).

#### ***Research environment***

Australia has long been perceived by Chinese students as a desirable nation to conduct PhD research. The six PhD students mentioned that Australia's excellent natural environment, high-quality higher

education, multicultural society, relatively relaxed immigration policy, and generous scholarships attracted them.

According to the Times Higher Education's World University Rankings for 2022, Australia has 37 top universities, among which six are ranked in the prestigious top 100 (Times Higher Education, 2021). The top-ranking universities all have research strengths in humanities and social sciences. Moreover, Australian universities have a long tradition of teaching and researching China studies. According to the Chinese Studies Association of Australia (CSAA), 23 Australian universities across 8 states and territories have established Chinese studies programs, departments, institutes or research centres (Chinese Studies Association of Australia, n.d.). As most Chinese PhD students in humanities and social sciences choose China-based topics for research, Australia's rich academic resources in China studies compared with other Western nations make it a suitable place for their PhD research.

*There are Chinese or non-Chinese academics with research expertise in China in most disciplines in humanities and social sciences at my university. It is easy for Chinese students to find a suitable supervisor to work with. (Student participant 1)*

*China studies is the most popular area among area studies in Australian universities simply because China is very important to Australia in many aspects. I believe more and more China experts will be needed in the future in Australia, so I chose here to do my PhD [sic.]. (Student participant 3)*

In addition, Australia is also believed to be a 'cost-effective' country to do PhD research compared with other nations with a strong international reputation for research excellence, such as the U.S., Canada and Singapore.

*Australian universities do not require Graduate Record Examinations (GRE), which is an extremely time-consuming task for PhD applicants. The IELTS score that meets the English language requirement for PhD admission of Australian universities will suffice. (Student participant 2)*

*Standard duration of a full-time doctoral degree in Australian universities is 3-4 years, which is shorter than the average 4-6*



*years in the U.S. I can start working on my research project as soon as I enrol in the PhD program without taking any coursework. (Student participant 4)*

The six student participants who are in the 2nd or 3rd year of their PhD studies or have completed their PhDs are basically satisfied with the research environment, facilities and opportunities provided by their universities, including working space, library resources, and conference and fieldwork funding. Their PhD research projects are funded by a wide range of scholarship schemes, including PhD scholarships funded by the China Scholarship Council (CSC), scholarships for international Higher Degree Research students offered by Australian universities and the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation.

### ***Students' experiences of PhD research***

The six student participants all chose China research projects because they believed their pre-existing knowledge about China's history, society, culture and politics, as well as their native Chinese language skills, gave them an incomparable advantage over non-Chinese students. Their networks in China also helped with their research data collection and fieldwork. The students also regarded the completion of a PhD thesis within the required timeframe of 3-4 years as being easier to achieve on a China-related topic than if they had chosen to write on a non-China topic. Most of the participants believed that the doctoral completion timeframe, of 3-4 years of full-time study at Australian universities, was their greatest challenge. The comments of two participants illustrate their anxieties on this matter:

*My scholarship only covered 3.5 years. It is very challenging to finish a good thesis within 3.5 years. I started extensively reading English literature and writing in English when I began my PhD. I had to spend more time on reading and writing than local PhD students. My supervisor suggested I extend a semester, but I didn't have the money to pay for the tuition fee and had to hastily submit my thesis at the end of 3.5 years. (Student participant 1)*

*Due to the limited time to complete my thesis, I only had two*

*months to conduct fieldwork in China. I didn't obtain sufficient data which I expected to collect. If given a chance to re-do my PhD, I hope I would have more time to do fieldwork [sic.].*  
(Student participant 4)

Another major challenge for several of the participants was the 'ideological dissonance' (He, 2000) they encountered during the early phase of their PhD candidature. The restrictions on academic freedom in mainland China are widely known. Especially in the humanities and social sciences, undergraduate and postgraduate students have to use textbooks compiled by scholars and research institutions approved by the Ministry of Education for core units. This ensures the teaching content of different disciplines at different universities continues along the right ideological track in accordance with historical materialism and Communist ideologies. For some disciplines which are closely related to politics and ideology, such as journalism, ethnology and religious studies, the Marxist view of these disciplines is greatly emphasized in theory teaching. Courses like Marxist Journalism Theories, Marxist Ethnic Studies, Marxist Religious Studies are core units with dedicated textbooks for certain majors (Chen, 2018; People's Daily, 2010).

Since President Xi Jinping came to power in late 2012, ideological control of teaching and research in higher education institutions, especially in social sciences and humanities, has been greatly tightened to enhance the guiding role of Marxism (Denyer, 2016). President Xi, in a speech delivered at a symposium on philosophy and social sciences for socialist development, in May 2016, stressed the importance of integrating Marxism, socialist practices and Chinese traditions in various fields of philosophy and social sciences and called for 'developing a system of philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics' (Xinhua, 2016). Critical thinking to promote open discussion of controversial issues and free expression of different voices and positions without fear of penalty through meaningful and respectful dialogues, which is greatly emphasized in liberal arts education in the West (Pinto and Portelli, 2009), is seriously deficient in humanities and social sciences education in China because of the CCP's ideological indoctrination. Students from this background usually need some time to build up their critical thinking ability after they start their PhD research to adapt to the critical thinking tradition of Western academia.

*I received my BA and MA in journalism in China. The readings suggested by my supervisor in the first year of my PhD opened up a new world for me. I felt very excited when I first learned new concepts and theories about alternative media, radical democracy, mediated social change and so on. The access to Western academic thoughts and theories enables me to reflect upon what I was taught in China and develop a critical thinking ability that is not encouraged in China. I do not want to say the media knowledge I learnt before is all wrong. But it is at least incomplete and could not explain the complex media environment in the world. (Student participant 5)*

However, some students still have to consider if their PhD topics are politically acceptable to the Chinese government, even though they are conducting research overseas and have full access to Western academic resources. We found that PhD students who are funded by the Chinese government or intend to go back to China to work after completing their PhD are more likely to exercise self-censorship in PhD topic selection. The ‘political correctness’ of their research topic is both a precondition of their Chinese government scholarship and essential if they wish to secure an academic position and develop a research career in China after graduation.

*I am a CSC-funded PhD student. CSC had to review my research proposal before they offered me a scholarship. If my topic was not accepted by the government, how could I receive a scholarship from CSC? As agreed, I have to return to China to work after my PhD. I need to ensure my topic and argument are on the right political track. (Student participant 6)*

*I have to go back to China to work after graduation. If my topic is too sensitive or too marginalised in China, it would be difficult for me to find an academic job. If I could stay in Western academia, I may work on a different topic. I think this is a common strategy for Chinese scholars. (Student participant 1)*

While relating experiences of doing fieldwork in China, all participants agreed that ‘guanxi’ (networks) was very important for research data gathering. Knowing an insider was extremely useful for recruiting interviewees or getting access to rare resources in libraries and

archives. All participants noted the lack of research networks and their international student status as difficulties that hindered their fieldwork in China. Moreover, as one participant who worked on a politically sensitive topic concerning Xinjiang observed:

*It took me two months to finish my ethics clearance as the ethics review panel had assumed that China was an authoritarian state with restricted freedom of speech and that researchers who work on sensitive topics were likely to be detained. It took me a lot of time to explain China's political and research environment to the panel and persuade them to approve my application. In practice, I found my participants were very alert if they were asked to give comments on my topics of interest. Fortunately, an old classmate has some guanxi with the local archives centre so I was allowed to access the archives that I wanted to read. I collected less data than I had expected during my fieldwork but gained valuable experience while doing fieldwork in China. (Student participant 4)*

### **Relations with supervisors**

As PhD training in Australia in the humanities and social sciences remains strongly reliant on the British tradition of one-on-one supervision, it is crucial for students to be assigned a suitable leading supervisor (usually with one or two co-supervisors or associate supervisors as a complement). Students must feel that their supervisors are approachable and able to provide timely intellectual support if they are to maintain a congenial and productive relationship with them throughout their candidature. When asked what criteria they used in choosing their supervisors, our participants said that they valued the research expertise, research excellence and academic seniority of their supervisors. The majority said it was immaterial to them whether the supervisor was Chinese.

*I think the match of research interest between student and supervisor is the most important thing. It would be hard to complete a good thesis if your supervisor is not an expert in your area and could not offer you valuable feedback. Of course, whether the supervisor has research excellence and a good reputation in academia also need to be considered. (Student*

participant 2)

*I think the academic position of the supervisor is also important. Most PhD students would like to work with senior researchers rather than junior ones because professors have more experience in supervising PhD students. Their extensive research networks and reputation in academia could be helpful for my future career. (Student participant 4)*

*I'd prefer to work with non-Chinese supervisors and experience different teacher-student relations. As [far as] I know, most Chinese supervisors are very tough because they were educated in China and believe 'talented students are trained by strict teachers'. (Student participant 6)*

Most participants expressed satisfaction with the supervision they had received from their supervisory teams. They used the words 'timely', 'supportive', 'enlightening' and 'good' to comment on the quality of the supervision. However, a few students had complaints about their supervisors.

*My principal supervisor is very busy because he has an administrative position and supervises three PhD students. He replies to my emails and gives comments on my writing very slowly. I have to look for support from my co-supervisor who doesn't know my topic very well. (Student participant 6)*

### **Self-evaluation and career expectation**

Our participants were asked to evaluate what they perceived as the advantages and disadvantages of being an international student as compared to local PhD students. All of them regarded their inferior English writing skills as a clear disadvantage for them as international Chinese PhD students. Several participants felt that local students had also received better training in research methodology and presentation skills during their MA and BA studies, noting that Chinese students had to catch up on these skills during their PhD candidature. The majority also regarded local students as better at research network building, independent thinking and interpersonal communication. In

this connection, they noted that because of scholarship and visa time limits, Chinese international students were under significant pressure to complete their degree on time and thus often sacrificed their social time to stay focused on their research. For this reason, they also felt that their fellow Chinese international PhD students were generally more hardworking and self-disciplined than local students.

When asked about their career expectations, all participants said they hoped to secure academic positions, preferably at an Australian university. However, they acknowledged that the academic job market in Australia is highly competitive and said that they would also consider returning to China or applying for academic positions in other countries. Two of our participants had already completed their PhDs and had returned to China, with one working in the media industry and the other at a Chinese university.

*It would be great if I could find a lecturer position in Australia. But the job market is extremely competitive in my area in Australia. My supervisor said I need at least two or three years after [my] PhD to build up my track record. It would be easier to find an academic job in China. My plan is to find a good university in China first and build up my English publications in the next few years. I will keep an eye on the job market in Australia and apply for jobs when I become strong enough. (Student participant 2)*

*My PhD was funded by CSC, so I had to return to China to work for at least two years after graduation. I am currently a lecturer at a top university in my area in China, but I have found that I cannot fully concentrate on my research due to heavy teaching and administrative workloads. The relations among colleagues are much more complicated than in Australia. The research environment here is worse than I anticipated. Before I came back [to China], I had the plan of building up my research and [then] looking for an opportunity to go back to Australia to work. However, it looks like there is a long way to go to realize such a plan. (Student participant 1)*

## **Supervisors' Experiences**

For supervisors, we asked a total of 5 questions (see Appendix 2) related to their experiences in supervising PhD students from mainland China. The interview questions ranged from general information about Chinese PhD candidates and the selection criteria used to enrol them (Q1, 2), to specific questions regarding the main difficulties faced by international Chinese students in their PhD research (Q3), supervisory challenges in ensuring that these students complete their degrees (Q4), and skill gaps for PRC PhD students to improve for success (Q5).

The four supervisors who answered our survey said that they regularly receive enquiries from mainland China applicants who wished to work on China-related research topics. The number of applications received by these supervisors ranged from two to ten per year. According to the supervisors, the quality of the research proposal, the relevance of the proposal to the supervisor's research expertise, and English-language proficiency were the three main selection criteria for deciding whether or not to accept an applicant for supervision. We concluded three main skills that supervisors suggested their PRC PhD students improve to achieve success.

### ***Academic Writing in English***

We found that supervisors have deep concerns about the English-language proficiency of Chinese PhD students and that they regard poor English as the most basic obstacle to their academic progress. Two professors singled out poor writing and an inability to think in English (Supervisor participant 4) and insufficient comprehension of English-language disciplinary literature (Supervisor participant 3) as particular concerns.

Clearly, Chinese PhD candidates must meet the English language requirements set by Australian universities or they could not be enrolled<sup>2</sup>. However, there is a striking gap between the skills that they acquired to pass the IELTS test and the academic writing skills required for PhD research. In other words, prospective PhD candidates who do well in the IELTS test, often through extensive study and training

<sup>2</sup> The language requirement usually ranges from an overall band score of 6.5 to 7.0 for IELTS (International English Language Testing System) with no band below 6.0 to 6.5. This differs slightly according to different disciplines and universities.

in English language schools in China, may not possess the range of academic skills implicit in good research writing. This problem also exists among other international higher-degree research student cohorts in Australia (Son & Park, 2014; Yu & Wright, 2016; McCrohon & Nyland, 2018). On the issue of the heavier workloads resulting from supervising international PhD candidates, two of our interviewees stated:

*A big challenge for me to lead a PRC PhD student to completion is still the language problem. I have spent far too much time correcting their English, fixing their grammar, and finding a better and more efficient way for them to express themselves clearly. (Supervisor participant 4)*

*I find supervising PRC students very labour-intensive. I am very closely involved in shaping the writing that PRC students produce. In early to mid-candidature I find myself substantially rewriting large sections of their research notes and draft chapters. I do so to indicate how academic writing should be done and the level of scholarly argumentation required. (Supervisor participant 2)*

As these PRC PhD students study English as their second language in China, the difficulties for them to write academically in English lie not only in the linguistic differences between Chinese and English, but also factors such as differences in cultural and educational values, rhetorical strategies, and reader awareness (Jiang, 2011). The problem is not new and it also exists among students from other non-English speaking countries (Lin & Scherz, 2014). Earlier we noted that PRC PhD students view their lack of English proficiency as a disadvantage compared to local students and that all remarked that they did their best to improve their English language skills throughout their candidature. With the patient guidance of supervisors, their English writing skills usually improved significantly over time. Supervisor participant 2 noted that all her PRC students were very conscientious and that their English and academic writing improved ‘fairly rapidly as they progressed through their candidature’.

### **Critical Thinking Skills**

The four supervisors all indicated that critical thinking skills need



to be improved for their PRC students. As an interviewed supervisor remarked:

*Biggest knowledge gap, apart from language difficulty, is what I call 'research literacy'. They are not used to doing critical analysis and independent analysis. To be able to develop a critical perspective and to develop the critical language is very important. (Supervisor participant 4)*

Critical thinking is associated with concepts like data-based decision-making, independence, open-mindedness, rationality, reflective evaluation and wisdom (Brodin, 2015; Holmes et al, 2015). Ronald Barnett (2015) suggests that there are three forms of criticality: critical reasoning through formal knowledge, self-reflection, and critical action towards the world. Doctoral education is expected to enable students to attempt criticality through questioning, writing, and developing relationships among the academy (Brodin, 2015). The insufficiency in critical thinking skills can arguably be contributed in part to the differences in educational practice between China and Western countries.

Dong (2015) has observed that the Chinese educational tradition has tended to encourage an uncritical culture in learning. Confucianism as a normative paradigm has been the dominant force in shaping Chinese pedagogy and in making it extremely exam-oriented. This has produced a fundamental difference between Chinese and Western approaches to key concepts such as 'truth'. Knowledge in the Confucian paradigm was considered 'infallible, and therefore the teachers were too... An answer that a Chinese teacher would give should be the final solution to their students' puzzles, not a clue or guide for the students to find their own answers' (Dong, 2015: 362). With 'truth' normalised as synonymous with institutional authority in this manner, there is little space for critical thinking in Chinese education. What Chinese education has focused on is mastery of received knowledge which is pursued at the expense of the students' ability to raise and answer questions (Anderson, 2016). Conversely, in Western universities, where undergraduate students not only acquire discipline-based knowledge but are encouraged to interrogate what they have learned as received 'truth', critical thinking is seen as essential for research at the graduate level (Sullivan & Guo, 2010). In our view, the cognitive orientation of

Chinese education is a formidable barrier to the teaching and practice of critical thinking. Indeed, research has found that this barrier to critical thinking in Chinese education does not reside with the students but with the teachers, who are generally reluctant to teach a critical thinking course (Chen, 2013).

### ***Social Skills***

In addition to the language and critical thinking skills mentioned above, three supervisors also emphasized the importance of improving social skills to better accommodate to Australian culture, communicate with supervisors and build up networks in academia. In the meantime, they also urged supervisors and universities to pay more attention to the welling being of international research students.

Doing PhD study in Australia, in many ways, is also a ‘socialization’ process for Chinese PhD students, as it is for other international students. They usually experience a variety of challenges –emotional, linguistic, intellectual and cultural– simply because they have not encountered similar situations in their previous living environment. For example, they may feel uncomfortable about local socio-cultural norms or feel alienated because they cannot understand local accents and jokes. They may also encounter discrimination, prejudice or negative stereotyping. One study has found that many international students from culturally ‘hierarchical societies’ struggle to openly express their expectations and different viewpoints with their supervisors, resulting in a situation of unhappy tension (Son & Park, 2014; Wang & Li, 2011). In addition, completing a PhD project within a tight timeframe can also aggravate anxiety and pressure. These challenges and problems, to a certain degree, have affected how Chinese PhD students, as international students, have interacted with their peers and supervisors in Australia.

The growing body of research on the social well-being of international students in Australia has documented issues including: culture shock (Hellsten, 2002), loneliness (Sawir et al., 2008), perceptions of discrimination from domestic students and academic staff (Guilfoyle & Harryba, 2011; Novera, 2004), limited interactions between international-local students (Yu & Wright, 2016) and social isolation associated with the relatively individualized nature of higher degree

research studies in Australia (Cotterall, 2011). These issues are reflected in the interviews we conducted with student and supervisor participants. To cope with these issues, it does not only require international research students to improve their social skills to accommodate a new learning environment but also needs supervisors and universities to provide constant support and care.

## **Conclusion**

We conducted in-depth interviews with a small number of PRC PhD students doing China-related research in the humanities and social sciences and PhD supervisors in Australian universities, to better understand the concerns, challenges and expectations of both groups.

Our interviews found that the limited timeframe of the PhD scholarship posed by far the greatest challenge for PRC PhD students. They felt it was unrealistic for them to complete a high-quality thesis in a different language in no more than three years (or 3.5 years, if they were successful in applying for an extension of their scholarship). It became clear to us that their educational experience in China and their awareness that they must avoid placing themselves at political risk adversely affected their willingness to adapt to the critical orientation of the research culture in Australian universities. It was also clear that supervisors were not unsympathetic about the problems that their PRC PhD students faced. However, for these students to succeed, the supervisors had to remind them constantly of the need to improve their English and their critical thinking and social skills.

To date, there has been little public discussion or academic research about the many cultural challenges and educational difficulties faced by international research students from the PRC and other countries when they enrol as PhD students at Australian universities. This article aims to provide a vignette to initiate and shed light on further research. Especially when student learning experience and internationalisation have become Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for measuring the success of universities across the world. It has been reported that many postgraduate research students suffer from inadequate support from supervisors and universities and have to drop out (Wakeford, 2004) and the duty of care to the increasing number of international students in Australian universities is often overlooked (Burton-Bradley, 2018).

Due to Australia's strict border closure during the COVID-19 pandemic, applications for Australian universities from international students have significantly dropped, which will have a long-term impact on Australia (SBS News, 2021). Moreover, the pandemic and geopolitical tensions between Australia and China in the last few years have already caused a decline in Chinese international students coming to Australia (Lehmann, 2021). It is therefore more urgent and important to understand the cultural and educational challenges of the cohort of international PhD students from China and elsewhere and think about how to improve their learning experience to further build up the quality of research training and global reputation of Australian universities in the post-pandemic era.

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## **Appendix 1: Interview Questions for PRC PhD Students**

1. Why did you choose Australia to conduct your PhD research?
2. Who funded your PhD research?
3. Why do you want to research a China topic in Australia?
4. How do you like your PhD supervision?
5. What challenges do you have in completing your thesis?
6. As a PhD student who received BA and MA degrees in China, did you encounter 'ideological dissonance' in the early stage of your PhD life?
7. Do you exercise self-censorship in PhD research topic selection?
8. Did you have difficulty in doing fieldwork in China for your project?
9. Are you satisfied with the research environment in your university?
10. What are your criteria to choose supervisors?
11. Do you prefer to work with ethnic Chinese supervisors or non-Chinese supervisors?
12. Compared with local students or students from other nations, what advantages and disadvantages do you think Chinese PhD

students have?

13. What's your career plan after completing PhD?

## **Appendix 2: Interview Questions for Supervisors**

1. Are you currently supervising PRC PhD students? How many PRC PhD students have you supervised?
2. How many PRC students express interest to do PhD with you every year? What are your primary criteria to select PRC PhD students?
3. What are the key challenges and difficulties for your PRC PhD students to successfully complete PhD?
4. What are the key challenges and difficulties for you to lead a PRC PhD student to completion?
5. What skills do you think your PRC PhD students need to improve?

## **About the authors**

**Dr Jian Xu** is a Senior Lecturer in Communication at Deakin University, Australia. He researches China studies with a particular focus on the role of digital media and communication and the politics of celebrities in Chinese society. He is series editor of Asian celebrity and fandom studies with Bloomsbury and has widely published in journals in Chinese studies, Asian studies, media and cultural studies and celebrity studies.

**Dr Wai-wan Vivien Chan** is a Research Professor in the Institute of Public Policy South China University of Technology, China. She researches Chinese migrants, urban studies and gender studies. She is the author of *Female Chinese Bankers in the Asia-Pacific: Gender, Mobility and Opportunity* (Routledge, 2020).

## **Contact**

Email: [j.xu@deakin.edu.au](mailto:j.xu@deakin.edu.au)

Email: [vivienwwhk@hotmail.com](mailto:vivienwwhk@hotmail.com)



## **Self-authored motivations of US adult basic education English learners**

Jennifer Ouellette-Schramm  
Walden University, USA

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*Many adult English learners enroll in U.S. Adult Basic Education programs every year. The federally defined goal of these programs is to increase adult learners' skills to enable them to enter the workforce, but it is not clear whether this purpose matches learners' own motivations for entering these programs. Using the lens of self-authorship theory of adult development, this small qualitative case study investigated learning motivations among three adult Els in an Adult Basic Education college and career preparation class. Data included two qualitative interviews per participant, demographic questionnaires, and reading scores. Interviews were analyzed using the grounded theory approach to qualitative interview analysis. This study presents findings unique to three learners in this study, which was part of a larger cases study investigating learning experiences of nine adult learners from an adult developmental perspective. The three learners in this study constructed meaning from a developmental perspective growing toward self-authorship, characterized by orienting to an internal authority and self-defined goals. This article discusses these distinct self-authored learning motivations and offers implications for adult education programs to respond to the self-authored learning motivations of adult English learners.*

**Keywords:** *self-authorship, adult development, adult basic education, learning motivation*

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## Introduction

Recent U.S. national data shows that in 2017 and 2018, more than half a million adults, the vast majority of whom were classified as English learners (ELs), participated in American Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). A primary purpose of ABE programs in the U.S. is to help adult learners acquire skills to increase employability and meet workforce needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). This workforce preparation emphasis shapes how ABE programs are required to measure impact and success. According to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), federally funded ABE programs must report on adult learners' standardized test scores and entry into workforce training, postsecondary education, and the workforce (National Coalition for Literacy, 2021). The National Coalition for Literacy (2021), however, advocates for a broader way of measuring impact that reflects the spectrum of outcomes ABE programs also serve, including civic and family engagement and adults' learning and self-development objectives. Supporting adult learners' own objectives aligns with core assumptions of andragogy, including that adults possess a self-directed orientation in which readiness to learn is rooted in their own goals and social roles (Knowles et al., 2020). From the perspective of adult developmental psychology, this self-directed orientation is particularly relevant among adults constructing meaning from a "self-authoring" stage of development, or developmental perspective. Research on adult EL experiences in ABE programs using the lens of adult constructive development has found that adults' distinct developmental perspectives can shape ways of experiencing learning in relationship to their own goals, including for those constructing meaning from a self-authoring perspective (Ouellette-Schramm, 2019; Kegan et al., 2001). In a seminal longitudinal study of adult ELs in ABE programs, some adult ELs felt supported and engaged while others felt frustrated or lost, depending on the learner's distinct constructive-developmental perspective (Kegan et al., 2001).

This small qualitative study was part of a larger case study investigating the learning experiences of adult ELs in a U.S. ABE college and career preparation class. In that study, three participants developing toward the constructive-developmental perspective of "self-authorship" described distinct learning motivations (Ouellette-Schramm, 2016). The purpose of this paper is to highlight those motivations to help adult educators respond to the self-authored goals that some learners may bring to ABE programs and classrooms.

### **Self-authorship development and adult ELLs**

In the field of adult psychological development, self-authorship can be seen as a stage of self-development integrating complex epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal, or identity, dimensions (Boes, Baxter Magolda & Buckley, 2010). Epistemologically, a self-authoring perspective is characterized by openness to considering new perspectives, a view of knowledge as multilayered and contextual, and complex frameworks for understanding the world and one's place within it (King & Baxter Magolda, 2007). Interpersonally, self-authorship includes a capacity to maintain boundaries, a trust of one's internal voice and a clear orientation to an internal compass rather than living up to others' expectations. Intra-personally, self-authorship is marked by an internally generated sense of authority, a capacity to maintain boundaries, and an orientation to living up to self-expectations. In Kegan's (1982, 1994) model of constructive development, self-authorship is distinguished from two previous developmental orientations, "socializing" and "instrumental." From a socializing developmental orientation, adults orient to living up to the expectations of valued others rather than identifying with an internal compass and identify with their relationships to important others and group memberships, such as religious, political, or community (Kegan, 1982, 1994). From an instrumental orientation, adults identify with tangible self-interest and construct meaning from a concrete, black-and-white perspective (Kegan, 1982, 1994). While Kegan's constructive-developmental model (Kegan, 1982, 1994) highlights these broad developmental orientations, many adults construct meaning partially from one stage, the stage they are growing out of, and partially from the next stage they are growing into. For example and adult can construct meaning between a socializing and self-authoring developmental

orientation. In this transition, an adult makes meaning from both the socializing perspective she is growing out of and the self-authoring perspective she is growing into. For example, she may still feel beholden to valued others' expectations while at the same time, developing her own perspective on those expectations and a stronger internal voice (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Because growth in adulthood is gradual, adults can construct meaning between developmental stages for an indefinite period of time (Baxter Magolda, 2004; Kegan 1982, 1994).

Self-authorship theory derives from Western developmental psychology and much of the original theory was developed through interviews with predominantly white American adults in university settings (Baxter Magolda, 2004; Boes, Baxter Magolda & Buckley, 2010). At the same time, self-authorship development describes personal meaning-making as influenced and shaped by social context, thus offering the possibility of many diverse cultural and socioeconomic influences on the journey toward self-authorship (Boes, Baxter Magolda & Buckley, 2010). Research that provided insight into self-authorship development among adults with diverse cultural identities includes studies of ethnic identity development among Latinx college students (Torres, 2010); experiences that promote self-authorship among college students of colour (King & Baxter Magolda, 2007); and learning experiences among adults who immigrated to the United States (Ouellette-Schramm, 2016; Kegan et al., 2001). These studies have found similar core meaning-making structures among culturally diverse adults developing toward self-authorship, with patterns of growth shaped by varied influences including culture. In her longitudinal research investigating the self-authorship development of Latinx university students, Torres (2010) found that self-authorship development appeared to go hand-in-hand with cultural identity development. As Latinx students developed toward self-authorship, they grew toward more complex racial perspectives from which they recognized racism and saw a choice between positive and negative racial connotations in defining their ethnic identity, and eventually toward being able to understand their own cultural identities and influences, integrate cultural choices into daily experiences, and in some cases become more willing to advocate for other Latinx people (Torres, 2010). Research exploring self-authorship among culturally and racially diverse populations found that among African American-identifying adolescents, self-authorship development can be supported

by resilience, or the ability to successfully bounce back from life challenges and disruptions (Meszaros & Lane, 2010). In addition, King & Baxter-Magolda (2007) found that among undergraduate students who identified as African American or Hispanic, self-authorship development can be marked by experiences of dissonance as these young adults tried to reconcile their peers' disparate perspectives rooted in different cultural and racial contexts. Studies of adults who immigrated to the U.S., including adult ELs in ABE programs, found that learners developing toward self-authorship experienced increased confidence and described valuing education to increase self-expression and to pursue more satisfying career goals (Kegan et al., 2001; Roloff Welch, 2010)

### **Motivations of adult ELLs in adult college preparation programs**

Research on adult EL learning motivations in ABE programs found that factors affecting learning motivation included intrinsic motivation within a particular learning situation or to achieve a longer-term goal, and task value, or the value one assigns to what they're learning (Mellard et al., 2013). Additionally, adult ELs described wanting to improve their writing skills in English to further their career and academic goals (Rahilly, 2004) and were motivated by seeing progress toward their goals (Mellard et al., 2013; Reynolds & Johnson, 2014).

Limited findings on the motivations of self-authored ELs in ABE programs included wanting to become more competent in meeting self-defined standards, with a tendency to approach education with the purpose of becoming something or someone aligned with their own ideals (Portnow, Diamond & Rimer, 2001). Popp (2017) argues that self-authoring ELs in ABE can be distinguished by well-defined personal learning motivations and an interest in learning from different perspectives. Studies of learning experiences among adult learners (Bridwell, 2013) and ELs (Ouellette-Schramm, 2019; Kegan et al., 2001) in ABE programs found that adults developing self-authorship expressed qualitatively distinct learning motivations, and that developmentally intentional learning environments could promote self-authorship development (Roloff Welch, 2010). Characteristics of ABE learning environments supporting self-authorship development included approachable instructors and the opportunity for learners to give input into how class time is used; support for learners' life and

career goals; and constructive feedback from instructors (Roloff Welch, 2010).

## **Method**

### ***Research questions and design***

This study was part of a larger qualitative study investigating the learning experiences of ABE ELs in a college preparation course through a constructive-developmental lens, in order to help educators best support developmentally diverse learners. The question guiding this study was, “How do adult ELLs developing toward self-authorship describe their motivations in a college preparation class?”

This investigation employed a qualitative case study design to facilitate a deep understanding of the meaning of an experience from the perspective of those involved within a bounded system (Merriam, 2015), in this case, an ABE college and career preparation program. It employed Kegan’s (1982, 1994) constructive-developmental theory of self-authorship as a lens because of its capacity to distinguish self-authoring learning experiences among non-Western adults (Lindsley, 2011; Villegas-Reimers, 1996), including ABE ELs (Kegan et al., 2001), and its valid and reliable instrument for measuring meaning-making perspectives, the Subject Object Interview (SOI) (Lahey et al., 1998).

### ***Conceptual framework***

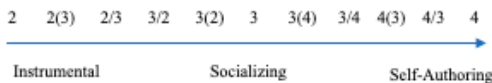
Kegan’s (1982, 1994) theory of self-authorship distinguishes cognitive, inter- and intrapersonal characteristics distinct from earlier stages of adult development, including socializing and instrumental, and one later stage, self-transcending, which is rare. Table 1 compares key epistemological, interpersonal and intra-personal characteristics of self-authorship, and the prior two stages, socializing and instrumental.

Table 1. Kegan’s (1982, 1994) Developmental Stage Characteristics

<b>Instrumental</b>	<b>Socializing</b>	<b>Self-Authoring</b>
Epistemological: Views knowledge as a “thing” that can be obtained. Can only take own perspective.	Epistemological: Views knowledge as coming from experts. Can take others’ perspectives.	Epistemological: Views knowledge as constructed; takes a complex perspective and considers multiple viewpoints in relation to one’s own.
Interpersonal: Others are experienced in relation to helping or obstructing one’s own needs.	Interpersonal: Identifies with important relationships, group membership.	Interpersonal: Can take a perspective on one’s relationships; values but is not defined by important others.
Intra-personal: Identifies with tangible characteristics, likes, and dislikes.	Intra-personal: Sense of self is shaped by the expectations of valued others.	Intra-personal: Orients to an internally generated set of values and living up to them.

The SOI, which measures these meaning-making perspectives, distinguishes sub-stages between each major stage. These substages illustrate the gradual nature of adult development, and adults can construct meaning at a substage “between” developmental stages, e.g., between socializing and self-authoring, for an indefinite period of time. Figure 1 shows these substages as measurable on the SOI, with corresponding SOI scores, where 2 indicates instrumental meaning-making, 3 indicates socializing, and 4 indicates self-authoring. The substage 3/4 indicates both socializing and self-authoring stages operating, with socializing still dominant, and the substage 4/3 indicates both socializing and self-authoring stages operating, with self-authoring dominant.

Figure 1. Substages and corresponding SOI scores



**Setting and participants**

This study occurred in a college preparation class at a nonprofit educational organisation in an urban midwestern ABE program. I was a manager in the organisation; thus, this class was both a convenience

sample, and one in which I was well-poised to develop “productive relationships” with participants (Merriam, 2015). Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were selected based on a minimum English reading level of High Intermediate as measured by the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System or Test of Adult Basic Education (CASAS), and teacher evaluation of sufficient English verbal skills for conversational-style interviews.

### ***Data collection and analysis***

Data included two in-depth qualitative interviews per participant, demographic questionnaires and reading scores.

### ***Subject object interview***

To understand participants' constructive-developmental perspectives, the SOI was administered. In this interview, participants are given words or phrases to prompt a story of a recent experience. For example, in response to the phrase “success,” a participant might tell a story of a recent experience achieving something that was challenging. Afterwards, the interviewer asks questions to assess the developmental perspective from which the story was told. Assessing constructive-developmental perspectives requires understanding how interviewees structure their experiences, rather than the content of their experiences; therefore, the SOI can be administered “to investigate how people make sense of their experience in a particular context or environment” (Lacey et al., 1988). Accordingly, to acquire additional information about participants' motivations, the SOI prompts were situated within the college preparation class. For example, instead of being asked, “Tell me about a time you experienced success,” participants were asked, “Tell me about a time you had success in the college preparation class.” To help ensure participants' meaning was accurately understood, I regularly reflected on what I heard and invited correction of possible misunderstandings.

A co-scorer and I independently read and coded each interview using the method described in the guide to administering and interpreting the interview (Lahey et al., 1988).

We are both certified raters, accomplished through training and practice culminating in accurate analyses of at least eight of ten SOI transcripts,



increasing the reliability of the developmental findings (Lahey et al., 1988).

To analyze data from the SOIs related to participants' learning experiences, I employed grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1965), beginning with line-by-line coding to help reduce bias or researcher projection of meaning (Charmaz, 2006). Initial literal codes were gradually abstracted during the process of constant comparison, and refined to more tightly fit the data, toward saturation (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1965).

### ***Learning experiences interview***

A one-hour learning experience interview was conducted with each participant to understand their learning motivations. This open-ended qualitative interview included questions such as, "What were you hoping to learn?" and "What are the most important things you're learning?"

Data from these interviews were analyzed using the same grounded theory process (Charmaz, 2006) described in the second analytical step of the SOI, including literal line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2006), abstraction of codes through the process of constant comparison, and continual refinement of the codes to fit the data more tightly, toward saturation (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1965).

### ***Demographic questionnaire and reading scores***

To contextualize findings and consider other factors that might impact them (Yin, 2009), I collected demographic information via questionnaire and reading scores as measured by CASAS.

### ***Trustworthiness, researcher's role, and reflexivity***

Consistent with the constructivist approach to grounded theory, which emphasizes that researchers' interpretations are constructed rather than objective (Charmaz, 2006), researcher reflexivity was employed. While gathering data, I maintained a journal, noting initial interpretations of interviews including my own theoretical biases (Merriam, 2015). During analysis, reflexive steps included memoing regularly to track my own process of theorizing. I also discussed initial findings during the

research process with an experienced colleague not connected to my research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), inviting alternate interpretations to my own (Krefting, 1991).

### **Findings**

The findings in this study describe the distinct learning motivations of three participants developing toward self-authorship from the original larger qualitative study of nine, which included learners constructing meaning from earlier developmental perspectives.

### **Participants developing toward self-authorship**

Three of the nine participants from the original qualitative study were developing toward a self-authoring perspective. In contrast, in the original study, four participants constructed meaning from an earlier socializing perspective and two constructed meaning from a primarily instrumental perspective. Notably but not surprisingly, self-authorship development was not connected to any one demographic factor. The three participants developing toward self-authorship came from different countries and cultures, including Mexico, Ecuador and China; two were 40 years old while one was 30; and they had been living in the U.S. for time periods spanning one to 25 years. While two had relatively high prior educational levels in their home countries, 11 and 13 years respectively, one had had only an eighth-grade education. While self-authorship development has sometimes been connected to formal education (Baxter Magolda, 2004; Weinstock, 2010), the diversity of backgrounds among these participants developing toward self-authorship is consistent with constructive-developmental theory's emphasis that growth in adulthood depends on the complex balance of support, challenge, and continuity in an adult's life rather than any one factor (Kegan 1982, 1994).

The three learners developing toward self-authorship included Masha, a 30-year-old woman who was ethnically Khazak, but from China; Maria, a 40-year-old woman from Mexico; and Salazam, a 42-year-old man from Ecuador. Masha explained that she was enrolled in the ABE program because she needed to get her GED in the United States to pursue her dream of attending art school. She explained that in China,

after grade eight, she had initially transferred to a teacher training school, which went through grade eleven, and culminated in a teaching credential for elementary schools in China. However, her degree was not recognized as a high school equivalent in the U.S. She explained, "I want to be a great artist... I throw everything, just coming to here, so that's my dream, going to the abroad country, study more. Global related, or... anything for art." (Masha, SOI). Maria had been living in the U.S. for ten months at the time of this study. She was from Cancun, where she had worked for several years as a jewellery salesperson. She had finished high school in Mexico and had studied accounting in college for a year without finishing a degree. She came to the United States to be with her wife, originally from Puerto Rico, who, Maria said, was a teacher and aspiring principal. Maria had originally come to the program for English language classes, but when she learned about the college and career preparation class, decided to take it because it looked interesting to her. While she didn't describe an immediate need to find work, she hoped that her studies would help her to re-enter a career in sales. She explained, "the positive, here, because I happy with my wife, but I hope I can get the same work, the same job." (Maria, SOI). Salazam had been living in the U.S. for 25 years at the time of the study. He'd completed grade eight in a rural Ecuadorian school and had driven to the U.S. with some peers 25 years ago with no English and in search of more opportunities and stayed ever since. He had previously earned his GED and entered the college preparation course to improve his academic English skills to attend a technical college so he could advance in his job. He described his janitorial position as "a dead-end job," and felt confident he could be successful in a supervisory position but needed a college degree to do so. He explained, "I have my GED, got a way back, but I have been away from school for a while, and now, I decided to go a technical school for at least two years but... I need to improve my reading, writing and comprehension" (Salazam, SOI).

Table 2 shows participants' demographics, reading levels and SOI scores.

**Table 2.** Demographics, English Reading Levels and SOI Scores

Participant	Age	Country of origin	Yrs. school in home country	First language(s)	Yrs. in U.S.	Yrs. school in U.S.	ESL/ABE reading level	SOI score
Maria	40	Mexico	13	Spanish	1	>1	High Int. ESL	3/4
Masha	30	China	11	Khazak, Uzbek, Kurgis, Chinese	4	1	High Int. ESL	3/4
Salazam	42	Ecuador	8	Spanish	25	7	Low Adult Secondary Ed.	4/3

ABE/ESL reading levels included scores within the following National Reporting System level range, from low to high: High Intermediate ESL, Advanced ESL; Beginning ABE Literacy; Beginning Basic Education; Low Intermediate Basic Education; High Intermediate Basic Education; Low Adult Secondary; High Adult Secondary.

## Learning experiences developing toward self-authorship

The three participants developing toward self-authorship in this study described learning motivations that were distinct from the motivations expressed by participants constructing meaning from earlier developmental perspectives in the original study. While all participants described wanting to help others as a learning motivation, participants developing toward self-authorship described wanting to help others by developing their own individuality. Consistent with the work readiness goals of many ABE programs, all participants also described wanting increased opportunities from their education; however, participants developing toward self-authorship specifically described wanting greater self-satisfaction from those increased opportunities. Finally, participants developing toward self-authorship uniquely described the motivation of learning for personal development.

### *Wanting to help others by developing individuality*

Participants constructing meaning from earlier developmental perspectives in the larger study described wanting to help others for reasons such as making valued others proud, from a socializing perspective, and wanting to help others in tangible, concrete ways, from an instrumental perspective. However, consistent with the self-authoring orientation to developing an internally defined identity,

participants growing toward self-authorship described wanting to help others by developing their own individuality. Masha explained, “I wanna... go to college, then, also I’m doing going to the art school, and then I have doing my own different idea.” She wanted to leverage her artistic talent and pursuits to help people in her artist community in China broaden their perspectives:

*I have to talk about my experience... to the student... because they didn't abroad country, they don't understand... the politics [is] controlling of what kind of knowledge [they have access to] ... so that is very important.*

### ***Wanting greater self-satisfaction from increased opportunities***

Participants in the original study who were constructing meaning from earlier developmental perspectives described wanting to increase their opportunities for reasons including being a better role model and increased income. While learners developing toward self-authorship also described some tangible learning motivations, including Salazam’s desire for financial stability, all learners developing toward self-authorship also described wanting greater self-satisfaction from the increased opportunities they were pursuing. Salazam explained, “When I came here it was always do something, pursue education. But it’s always in my mind, now, I feel I’m not satisfied, satisfied with myself... because I haven’t achieved... my goals. And so, I’m still pursuing.” Similarly, when asked about her learning motivation, Maria described, “I think first for feel better myself. And then, for get a job like that I want...I think it’s something personal for me. I think it’s make me feel good. It’s just for me...that will be a success for me.”

### ***Learning for personal development***

The three participants developing toward self-authorship uniquely described the desire to learn not only for practical reasons, but also for personal development related to self-defined goals or developing a broader perspective. Masha, the only learner in the study to express dissatisfaction with the class, described feeling bored with the emphasis on grammar and a desire for a broader curriculum: “Here, is just for focus for English language, and then that is not too much helpful for community studies... I think people have to be not for English, ‘she,’ ‘he,’

‘it,’ grammar...you can study that thing, but generally study things, for more thing.”

Maria, who had enrolled in the class because it seemed "interesting," described appreciating the content in the course that broadened her perspective: "I hope to know about the many books... or different topics. I like learning every day. Every day! (laughs)." The class had recently read the book, *The Color of My Words*, which Maria described as broadening her perspective through learning about other cultures. She explained, "You discover another world. With the book. And different stories, you learn about the different cultures, different like mine... and when you discover that world, ...I think it's good for myself." She also appreciated the TED Talk covered in the college preparation course, "The Danger of a Single Story," by Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie, who in her talk described realising she had held stereotypes of Mexicans living in America, a group that Maria belonged to. When asked what she liked about that talk, Maria explained, "I think have information for myself."

Salazam also appreciated learning for its own sake:

*I feel, I learn a lot about things, things that I didn't know about, like about daily life. Sometimes I bring teacher a topic, a topic to learn, different topics that I haven't, I was not aware before. And I'm learning, so, and it makes me... I thought I knew everything, but I say I am not. I'm still learning."*

Salazam also described appreciating learning that helped him not only prepare for his goal of college, but broaden his mind:

*It's hard because this assignment has two pages, four pages. It's not a simple one-page topic. It's broad. ... it's challenge, but challenging is better... it's more broad thinking. It expands my knowledge.*

## **Discussion**

The motivations that these ELs described for participating in the ABE college and career preparation course aligned with the theoretical construct of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2004; Kegan 1982, 1994). They were also broader than the employment-focused federally defined

goals (U.S. Department of Education, 2021) and reporting requirements (National Coalition for Literacy, 2021) of U.S. ABE programs. The learning motivations these participants described offer rich examples of what self-defined learning motivations can look like among adult ELs constructing meaning from or growing toward self-authorship. This is important because while ABE programs' success for continued funding are measured by metrics related to reading level gains and entry into post-secondary education or the workforce, programming focused solely or primarily on these metrics may not be sufficient to meet the expectations of adult learners themselves.

For Masha, a focus on reading level gains, as in, "English, 'she,' 'he,' 'it,' grammar" alone doesn't capture the broader learning she is interested in, as in, "...you can study that thing, but generally study things, for more thing." In fact, Masha was the only participant in this study who dropped out of the college and career preparation course soon after the study ended. The overall positive learning experiences Maria and Salazam described included yet exceeded what ABE programs are federally obligated to offer. Part of Maria's personal goal for attending the college and career preparation course was consistent with the purpose of developing skills to increase employability, as in, "I hope I can get the same work, the same job" and "...get a job like that I want...I think it's something personal for me." However, what she liked about the class was the opportunity to broaden her perspective, including reading books from people with different backgrounds than hers, as in, "when you discover that world, ...I think it's good for myself." Similarly, while Salazam's personal goals aligned with the employment readiness purpose of ABE programs, as in, "I haven't achieved... my goals. And so, I'm still pursuing," what he appreciated about the class was how it challenged him to broaden his perspective, as in, "it's not a simple one-page topic. It's broad. ... it's challenge but challenging is better... it's more broad thinking." This is important because learners growing toward self-authorship, characterized by an orientation to an internal compass and self-defined goals, may place expectations on their ABE programs exceeding reporting and funding requirements, thus complexifying what ABE programs need to do to satisfy and retain these learners.

Notably, the participants in this study were in the process of developing toward self-authorship and were about midway between

the developmental perspectives of socializing and self-authoring. In line with research with other populations of adult learners which found that adults developing toward self-authorship value “developmentally intentional” educational environments that challenge and support them in this transition, ELs developing toward self-authorship in ABE programs may also experience more intrinsic motivation in programs that support their growing self-authoring capacities. These learners’ self-authoring learning motivations affirm the argument posed by the National Coalition for Literacy (2021) that ABE programs are attracting adult ELs not only for employability skills but also for personal learning and growth goals and shed light on the importance of personal learning and growth, particularly for learners growing toward self-authorship, through an adult developmental lens. A theoretical perspective of self-authorship can help programs consider what these personal learning and growth goals might look like for self-authored learners who may be motivated by broadening their perspective and who may be more likely to assign task value (Mellard et al., 2013) to learning experiences that help them develop their own individuality.

### **Limitations**

The findings of the small qualitative case study are not generalisable, and are explanatory rather than causal (Yin, 2009). Factors outside the scope of this study, such as culturally influenced thinking patterns (Vorobel & Kim, 2011) and cultural identity as influenced by social, historical, and cultural factors (McKinley, 2015) also likely impacted learning experiences. Finally, my analysis was also constructed and necessarily partial (Charmaz, 2006).

### **Implications**

While ABE programs need to meet federal mandates that adult ELs English reading levels increase and that they obtain employment or enter post-secondary education programs, they also face the complex demand of responding to the personal learning and growth goals of these learners to provide programming in line with those who have self-authored learning motivations. Just as ABE programs are accountable to government funding agencies, they can also use self-authorship theory as a lens to exercise accountability to the adult learners they serve.



In the classroom, because ABE proficiency goals are often defined by academic and literacy skills (Pimentel, 2013), instructors can leverage the considerable flexibility they have with course content to select materials that can invite self-authored learners to explore multiple viewpoints and experiences to continue broadening their own perspectives, as in Maria's reflection, "when you discover that world, ...I think it's good for myself." In selecting teaching methods, instructors may employ "constructive-developmental pedagogy" strategies associated with self-authorship development in higher education, including validating learners' knowledge and ability to know, situating learning in learners' lived experiences, and approaching learning as a mutual construction of knowledge among learners and the instructor (Baxter Magolda, 1999). In validating learners' abilities to know, instructors may encourage active sharing of viewpoints, and challenge learners to develop viewpoints through assignments such as the one Salazam valued, e.g., "this assignment has two pages, four pages... it's broad. ... it's challenge but challenging is better." In situating learning in adult learners' lived experiences and goals, instructors may also support learners growing toward self-authorship in developing their individuality and self-satisfaction through a goals-based curriculum in which learners could engage in structured discussions of their goals, challenges, and successes. Drago-Severson (2004) recommends a goal-setting curriculum for supporting developmental growth in ABE settings, and structured learning not only from the instructor but the experiences of fellow adult learners invites learners into the process of mutually constructing knowledge with other learners as well the instructor (Baxter Magolda, 1999). Jordan (2020) similarly recommends that programs can support developmental growth among adult learners through strategies that promote open dialogue, including collective learning activities and sharing of personal stories. Where instructors are already doing this work, a lens of self-authorship development can validate this approach and encourage employing it intentionally and systematically.

On the program level, ABE programs can respond to learners by cultivating characteristics of ABE learning environments supporting self-authorship development including approachable staff and instructors and support for learners' life and career goals (Roloff Welch, 2010). They might support learners' own learning and development

goals by surveying learners at registration about the range of goals and motivation that brought them to the program, including but not limited to the workforce goals they must report on. Self-authoring adult ELs may appreciate opportunities to provide feedback about how programs are helping them pursue their goals could for continuous improvement. While programs may not yet be rewarded by federal reporting and funding structures for these efforts, they may contribute to the qualities of a successful program as related to the broader learning and growth motivations of the self-authored adult learners they serve.

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## About the author

**Jennifer Ouellette-Schramm** EdD is faculty in the Richard W. Wiley Program of Education and Leadership in the EdD Higher Education and Adult Learning specialization. She also serves as Interim Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Riverland Community College. She is a certified rater of the Subject Object Interview for assessing adult development and a Qualified Administrator of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). Her research has focused on the learning experiences and developmental growth among adult and community college learners and developmental and intercultural growth among instructors and faculty.

## Contact details

Email: [jennifer.ouelleteschramm@mail.waldenu.edu](mailto:jennifer.ouelleteschramm@mail.waldenu.edu)

## **Cultural participation patterns of prospective teachers in the context of informal learning<sup>1</sup>**

Peri Tutar  
Ministry of National Education, Turkey

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*This study was conducted to evaluate the lifelong learning culture of teacher candidates within the framework of the concept of cultural capital, which Bourdieu defines as the sum of intellectual qualities. The study employed the survey model as a quantitative research method. The study universe consisted of 538 prospective teachers attending Ankara University. Data concerning the cultural participation patterns among prospective teachers were collected through the “Cultural Participation Survey”. The data were analysed using frequency analysis, percentage analysis, chi-square testing, t-testing, and one-way variance analysis (ANOVA). As a result, it was found that the education level, working status and income of the families of teacher candidates indicated low socio-economic and socio-cultural origins. It was observed that the cultural participation levels of the teacher candidates were low and these levels varied significantly according to the education level and income status of their parents. On the other hand, there was no significant difference according to the class they studied and the working status of the parents.*

1 The present study was derived from a doctorate dissertation completed in Lifelong Learning and Adult Education Department at Ankara University Institute of Educational Sciences.

**Keywords:** *cultural participation, cultural capital, cultural participation of teachers, teacher education, culture and learning*

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## **Introduction**

School plays a vital role in societies as the transmitter of culture (Aydın, 1991; Genç, 2019; Dikici, 2022, Talas, 2019). Teachers, as transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1985), are among the most critical subjects in the transmission of culture. In this respect, teachers' cultural capital reflects the knowledge they can transfer to their students. Cultural capital, the sum of intellectual qualities (Bourdieu, 2015) as used in this study in the context of artistic equipment and aesthetic pleasures, is formed throughout life and primarily in informal learning environments. Creating this learning environment and ensuring that individuals have access to culture as a human right is a public responsibility (Çeçen, 1996; Erring, 2004). In this study, the cultural capital of teacher candidates, who play an important role in transferring social memory to future generations, was examined around lifelong learning and Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. In addition, the impact of neoliberal policies on the field of education as well as the cultural environment and class origin which affect the volume of teachers' cultural capital, were also included in the discussion. The fact that teachers are responsible for cultural change and renewal justifies being interested in their intellectual accumulation (Isık, 2014).

Teachers, transformative subjects, in Freire's (1998) term, represent an intellectual profession and are expected to be firstly lifelong learners. The humanist perspective in lifelong learning stems from an equalitarian understanding that encompasses all forms of learning in the width and process of life itself and supports the development of individuals and society in all aspects. When defined as all purposeful learning activities undertaken continuously to improve the knowledge, skills, and competencies, lifelong learning embodies formal and non-formal education, informal learning, and individual learning and learning in a group environment and the context of social movements, i.e. all forms of teaching and learning. In this context, lifelong learning brings a more holistic perspective to education and recognises learning secured

in various environments (IFLA, 2004). This perspective gives way to the notion that lifelong learning may be considered a multidisciplinary area of learning and the field of culture as one of the disciplines that boast the widest medium and opportunities for access. In this respect, when the cultural field is considered one of the disciplines with the most comprehensive channel and access opportunity for lifelong learning, which is a multidisciplinary learning field, the cultural participation of teachers can be considered an indicator of the learning culture.

Cultural participation, defined as an umbrella term to refer to the activities of individuals and groups in the production and use of cultural products and processes (Murray, 2005), is amongst the most effective forms of informal learning (Ahponen, 2009:78). UNESCO (2012: 51) defines cultural participation as participation in any activity that, for individuals, represents a way of increasing their own cultural and informational capacity and capital, which helps define their identity, and allows for personal expression. Such activities may be formal or informal or active or passive and therefore, may take several forms. An artistic pursuit, volunteering for a cultural event, watching movies, reading books, visiting a museum, a heritage site, or a library, attending a concert, a theatre, or a dance performance and even watching a cultural show on TV are among the examples of means employed by individuals for cultural participation.

The present research was born out of the question of how cultural participation and participation patterns may be considered an important indicator or element of the culture of learning. However, based on the argument that cultural participation patterns do not depend only on the will of individuals, independent of sociological and social conditions, the cultural participation of teacher candidates is discussed within the framework of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. At this point, cultural participation patterns were examined within the framework of Bourdieu's cultural capital theory in this study. The concepts of cultural capital and habitus among the sets of concepts developed within the context of social stratification in Bourdieu's sociology play a vital role in the analysis of the social conditions that allow an individual to attain cultural participation and cultural competency. According to Bourdieu, class distinctions are strongly associated with the amount of cultural capital and habitus available in the total capital volume of individuals and groups and economic inequalities. As the volume of cultural capital



achieved through family and education varies in different class contexts, changes therein create parallel changes in cultural competency, interest and participation. When considered from this perspective, various strata of the social context are occupied by distinct classes that are homogenous in terms of cultural practices and consumption habits. Each class may establish its class habitus by imposing a specific set of conditionings imprinted in the body of actuators. Bourdieu thus reveals the distinct lifestyles arising from the differences in total capital volume and the association between cultural consumption and social class conditions. Cultural practices cannot be considered an independent concept from economic and cultural capital. Such practices create a contract between those with such capital and those without it (Bourdieu, 2015b; Bourdieu, 2016; Jourdain and Naulin, 2016; Swartz, 2015).

Bourdieu analysed the association between predispositions in the world of arts and culture and social background at the empirical and theoretical levels. For example, an individual born in a family who not only listened to but also performed music and started to play a musical instrument at an early age and found opportunities to attend concerts would boast a higher chance of establishing a closer bond with music. Those from the public classes and middle class will not enjoy as high a chance as those from the dominant class to access such activities that require both economic and cultural capital. As for arts, such access will necessitate financial and cultural conditions and knowledge of opportunities and conditions of owning works of art (Bourdieu, 2015:119). Since the process of procuring culture is particularly slow in artistic contexts, an individual's background in access to culture that depends on their respective social position and education will create distinctions in cultural participation (Bourdieu and Darbel, 2017:37). Bourdieu (2015:136-150) associates the procurement, utilisation, and evaluation of a large variety of dimensions of cultural consumption such as classical music, jazz, drama and cinema defined by him as original competencies, with the possibilities made available to an individual in various contexts including family, school and business environments. The achievement of such competencies depends on the levels of encouragement and motivation afforded to individuals. According to Bourdieu, aesthetic taste is a product of class discipline and education rather than the specific sensitivities and competencies of the individual. In upper classes that enjoy further richness in their cultural capital, such

familiarity is secured firstly in the family and then at school, thereby generating the disposition required for cultural activities (Wacquant, 2016). The rise of cultural competency may not be considered independently from the family and the school or, more generally, the objective conditions surrounding the individual's birth. Therefore, the school is an important channel in determining the cultural capital of the students with the learning opportunities it offers to the students.

Bourdieu underlines that the school fails to create equal opportunities but plays a role in the reproduction of social inequalities and the legitimisation of such inequalities through a meritocratic discourse (Bourdieu, 2015a; Bourdieu ve Passeron, 2015; Lareau ve Horvat, 1999; Lewicka, 2013). However, the author paradoxically emphasises that “the cycle of ‘cultural necessity’ that requires long-term and ambitious participation for a permanent and ambitious predisposition to participation in cultural activities may only be broken by a pedagogical authority” (Bourdieu and Darbel, 2017:136). As is the case in other matters, the school may take the lead in eliminating the inequalities associated with a class background that lies behind cultural participation. In this context, teachers act as transmitters of culture and, thus, play an important role with the potential to transform cultural capitals. The cultural capital of teacher candidates is also affected by the current cultural opportunities and the political climate that determines these opportunities, as well as their sociological origins.

The arrangements imposed by neoliberalism on the field of education have also created deep effects on teacher training (Hill, 2005; Kavcar, 2002; Ünal, 2011). The social, political, and economic transformations witnessed during various periods in the history of Türkiye have led to a restructuring in the teaching profession along the axis of the specific goals respectively pursued during the same periods. Starting from the 1980s, the global form of the teaching profession moulded by the reflections of the neoliberal policies in place in the field of education has given way to the emergence of the technician teacher preparing pupils for exams (Yıldız, 2014: 13-24). The neoliberal era and the resulting climate marked by the commodification of knowledge and a focus on exams marked the onset of efforts to limit the role of the teacher in the transfer of information in the context of training. The meaning attributed to education ignored its social and cultural outputs and was dominated by purely self-interested orientations revolving around

the economy (Güven, 2014; Yıldız, 2014). Hence, teachers become estranged from their own species-being when education, despite being an essential medium in the transfer of culture, is reduced to teaching information through a strictly delimited curriculum. The meaning of the teaching profession is originally established on both training and the delivery of information, and once reduced to the mechanical transfer of information, such alienation becomes inevitable (Harvie, 2014:195).

However, the effects of teachers on students are not limited to their respective fields of expertise. Teachers affect students through their knowledge and skills, general knowledge, and perceptions and interpretations of life in every aspect of life. The school is a multi-component medium that not only represents a technical area that follows official curricula but also incorporates life patterns that affect the entirety of the existential development of students (Özcan, 2011). Education must equip students with dreams and utopias to the same extent that it does with technical, scientific, and professional development. In this process, teachers are not only transmitters of certain content but also transformative subjects because of their knowledge and decision-making and creativity capacities. Teachers, through their understanding of society and culture, play an active role in how students shape themselves and their lives. In other words, teachers are placed in, and are a part of, the culture that surrounds them as transformative luminaries in the learning process of their students (Freire, 1998; Freire, 2014).

The cultural capital of teachers represents a key element in creating and reproducing the culture of learning. Bourdieu considers teachers as the producers of culture that generate symbolic capital through symbolic labour (Swartz, 2015:135). Such a relationship between teachers and the reproduction of cultural capital requires focusing on the cultural habits and consumption patterns embraced by prospective teachers as young adults. Although there are many studies conducted on the cultural participation of teachers in Türkiye (Akbulut Ergüven, 2019; Avcı, 2015; Aydın and İflazoğlu 2021; Bucak, 2019; Etiz and Çogaltay, 2021; Güleç, 2019; Özgan and Karatasoğlu, 2016; Tösten, Avcı and Sahin, 2017; Kaplan and Çerçi, 2021), no study has been conducted on teacher candidates and therefore, it is necessary to focus on this group. The study's design assumed that cultural participation practices

reflected social stratification and cultural inequalities. Research studies that focus on the association between youth and culture because of the role of the youth in the future of society and the reproduction of culture offer data on how to approach the culture of lifelong learning. The tight bond between societal development and individual development and transformation does not reduce teachers' critical role and significance in this process despite the increasing diversification of resources of learning and information. The close connection between the development of societies and the development and transformation of the individual does not diminish the critical role and importance of teachers in this process, even though the sources of learning and information are increasingly diversified. In this context, the tools employed by young adults that have chosen teaching as their career path in this process as the transmitters of culture were examined through the following questions.

1. What are the habits and priorities of prospective teachers in cultural participation?
2. What is the relationship between the sociocultural background and socioeconomic level of prospective teachers and their behaviour in cultural participation?
3. Are there any differences between freshmen and senior students in terms of cultural participation?

## **Methodology**

### ***Research model***

The study employed the survey model as a quantitative research method. The survey model endeavours to offer a systematic description of or information on a situation, a problem, a case, a conclusion, a service, a programme, or a group or community or to identify the attitudes towards specific matters (Kumar, 1999: 9-11). The present study employed a cross-sectional survey design that entails the consolidation of the data required for the determination of cultural participation among prospective teachers in a specific range (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, and Demirel, 2012).

## **Study universe**

### ***Working group***

The study group consisted of teacher candidates studying in the 1st and 4th grades at the Faculty of Educational Sciences of Ankara University. The study group was determined by using the "easily accessible sampling" method, which is one of the purposive sampling methods. In the purposive sampling method, the researcher decides with whom he/she will carry out their work and thus includes the people he/she deems most reasonable for their research (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2013). In easily accessible sampling, the aim is to select the study group in line with its proximity to the researcher and ease of access (Patton, 2014). Ankara is one of the richest cities in Türkiye in terms of cultural and artistic opportunities. On the other hand, Ankara University is one of Türkiye's most established faculties of educational sciences. In order to exclude environmental barriers to accessing cultural opportunities, the study was conducted at Ankara University, where the researcher received her doctorate, taking into account the proximity to the researcher and the ease of access to data. In addition, due to the lack of a study dealing with the cultural capital of teacher candidates in Türkiye, this group was the focus of the study. In addition, it is thought that the research will fill a gap in the literature in terms of allowing the university education process to predict the contribution of teacher candidates to the acquisition of cultural capital. The working group is the universe about which opinions can be expressed, or generalizations can be made (Ural and Kılıç, 2005:27). The surveys were applied to all departments by way of a complete inventory. During Spring 2019, the surveys reached 559 respondents, namely 295 (54.8%) first-year students and 243 (45.2%) senior students.

### **Data collection**

The Cultural Participation Survey, developed by the author, was employed to collect data on the cultural participation patterns of prospective teachers. The survey was prepared on the basis of a comprehensive literature review on cultural capital and cultural participation culminating in specific parts and draft questions in the data collection tool. The tools devised domestically and abroad to

measure cultural capital and cultural participation were examined and utilised for the development of the survey (Avci, 2015; DiMaggio, 1982; Erbas, 1993; Habitat Dernegi, 2018; IKSÜ, 2017; IPSOS, 2012; Jeager, 2010; Katsillis and Rubinson, 1990; Robson, 2003; SEKAM, 2013; Seyfi, 2017; Sullivan, 2001; Ülker Demirel, 2014). The survey was based on the approach embraced by Bourdieu. The present study addressed cultural capital through the broad ethnographic meaning attributed to culture in empirical research by Bourdieu, as well as the artistic aspect including habits of going to a museum, the theatre, or the cinema as a dimension of the class analysis of individual lifestyles. Initially, the draft form was based on the relevant literature. Expert opinion was sought from seven scholars in total, namely two from the field of adult education, three from the field of scientific research methods, and two from the field of educational sciences, with respect to the construct validity of the data collection tool. The tool of two specific parts, namely “Personal Information Form” and “Cultural Activity Dimension” was finalised upon the exclusion of the questions considered irrelevant or repetitive in line with the suggestions derived from expert opinions. The data in the dimension of cultural participation were collected on a 7-point Likert scale of 12 questions. All items were prepared in a seven-point Likert-type scale to make the variables measurable and to minimise the answering time and effort by providing sufficient alternatives to the respondents.

In the part on personal information, the parental educational level represented cultural capital, while the parental employment status referred to their positions on the societal plane. The family income was representative of the economic capital, and the questions on cultural practices and activities pointed out the indicators of cultural participation. With this tool, the study aimed to collect data on the dimension of cultural participation, constituting one aspect of the study where Bourdieu considered all lifestyles.

While collecting the research data, it was tried to reach all 1st and 4th-grade students studying at Ankara University Faculty of Education. The questionnaire was collected in the classroom environment with the cooperation of the relevant faculty members before or after the class hours of the teacher candidates. Thus, 559 of 586 teacher candidates were reached, including those who did not continue their education despite being enrolled in the departments.

## **Data analysis**

It was seen that the data of 21 out of 559 teacher candidates who participated in the study were unsuitable due to the controls. The data of these 21 participants were removed from the data set and the analyses were carried out in the light of the data obtained from 538 teacher candidates. The data collected through the questionnaire were analysed with SPSS (The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) 25 for Windows Package Program. Descriptive analyses of demographic characteristics (parental education level, parental employment status, income status) and items in the data collection tool were analysed with frequency and percentage distributions. Frequency and percentage distributions are shown in tables and are useful in describing and presenting the existing situation. Thus, general conclusions were reached by inference of meanings from data (Köklü & Büyüköztürk, 2000). The data were following normal distribution after performing the Kolmogorow Smirnov test. Parametric tests were used in the analysis of data with normal distribution. Since the scale in the cultural activity dimension was suitable for the normality distribution, the independent sample t-test is used in the mean comparison of two independent groups (class level), and the One-Way t-test in the comparison of more than two independent groups (parent education level, parent working status, income status). The ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) test and LSD multiple comparison tests were used for differences between groups. The results were evaluated at a 95% confidence interval, at a significance level of 0.05.

## **Findings**

### ***Demographic characteristics***

The demographic characteristics specified in Table 1 may be construed explicitly as significant indicators for the identification of the association between class background and cultural participation among prospective teachers.

Table 1: Demographic data

<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>Mother</b>		<b>Father</b>	
	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Illiterate	38	7.2	7	1.4
Literate Only (No Degree)	13	2.5	7	1.4
Elementary School Graduate	224	42.6	136	26.6
Secondary School Graduate	92	17.5	89	17.4
Graduate of High School or Equivalent	116	22.1	142	27.7
Two-Year Degree	9	1.7	32	6.3
Bachelor's Degree	29	5.5	84	16.4
Master's Degree	5	1.0	13	2.5
PhD	-	-	2	.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>526</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Working Status</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Out of work, unemployed	372	70.3	21	4.0
Retired worker	19	3.6	91	17.5
Retired public servant	14	2.6	51	9.8
Permanently employed in public sector	35	6.6	118	22.7
Temporarily employed in public sector	7	1.3	9	1.7
Permanently employed in private sector	29	5.5	64	12.3
Temporarily employed in private sector	17	3.2	23	4.4
Self-employed	24	4.5	118	22.7
No regular employment, day jobs	12	2.3	24	4.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>529</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>519</b>	<b>100</b>
		<b>Total Income</b>		
<b>Total Monthly Household Income</b>			<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
TRY0-1000			24	4.6
TRY1001-2000			97	18.5
TRY2001-3000			146	27.9
TRY3001-4000			125	23.9
TRY4001 or higher			132	25.2
<b>Total</b>			<b>524</b>	<b>100</b>

Questions about the parents' education level, employment status and income were important indicators pointing to the socioeconomic status of teacher candidates. 91.4% of the mothers and 74.5% of the fathers of the teacher candidates had an education level of upper secondary school



or below. The percentage of mothers with a bachelor's degree or a higher degree was 6.5%, while this ratio was 19.3% among the fathers. The mothers of 70.3% of prospective teachers were identified as not working, i.e. unemployed. The monthly income level of approximately one-fourth of the families was at the level of TRY4000 or above. According to the 2018 data from the Statistical Institute of Türkiye, the hunger threshold for a family of 4 members is TRY1812, and the poverty threshold for the same is TRY5904. Therefore, approximately 23% of the families of prospective teachers currently lived at the hunger threshold, while 75% were at the poverty threshold.

Considering the paternal working status and income level as determining factors in societal positioning, the great majority of the prospective teachers were observed to come from a lower socioeconomic group. The paternal educational level, and educational outcome of the parents (diploma or degree), constituted an important indicator of the family's cultural capital, as well as the cultural capital inherited by the prospective teachers. The data above could indicate that the families of the prospective teachers may have low cultural capital.

### **Cultural participation patterns**

Table 2 shows prospective teachers' participation in various cultural activities in the last year.

Table 2: Participation in cultural activities in the last year

Cultural Activities	Never		Once		A Few Times		Every Month		Every Week		Every Day		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Visiting exhibitions, galleries, and museums	50	9.5	87	16.6	333	63.5	51	9.7	3	.6	-	-	524	100
Going to the theatre	114	21.5	105	19.8	253	47.7	51	9.6	6	1.1	1	.2	530	100
Going to the opera	387	75	82	15.9	41	7.9	4	.8	2	.4	-	-	516	100
Going to a ballet	436	83.8	45	8.7	32	6.2	4	.8	3	.6	-	-	520	100
Going to the cinema	37	7.1	43	8.3	253	48.8	165	31.9	19	3.7	1	.2	518	100
Going to concerts	179	34.1	91	17.3	221	42.1	28	5.3	5	1.0	1	.2	525	100
Going dancing	335	64.9	41	7.9	77	14.9	15	2.9	37	7.2	11	2.1	516	100
Listening to the radio	106	20.1	34	6.4	160	30.3	54	10.2	86	16.3	88	16.7	528	100
Going to the library	23	4.4	19	3.6	158	30.2	153	29.3	129	24.7	41	7.8	523	100
Attending ticketed cultural and artistic events	159	30.5	106	20.3	205	39.3	44	8.4	6	1.2	1	.2	521	100
Attending non-ticketed (free-of-charge / public) cultural and artistic events	158	30.2	95	18.1	222	42.4	38	7.3	9	1.7	2	.4	524	100
Going on a domestic holiday	160	30.5	114	21.7	237	45.1	12	2.3	2	.4	-	-	525	100

To analyse the teacher candidates' participation situation in cultural activities and the relationship with the demographic data, their status of participation in cultural activities such as exhibitions, galleries, museum visits, movies, theatre, opera, ballet, dance, concerts and holidays in the country and abroad were structured on various questions. 82.3% of the prospective teachers indicated that they had never attended a ballet performance, while 75% and 64.9% had not been to the opera

and dance performances, respectively. While the ratio of those that had never attended a concert was 34.1%, this ratio was 21.5% with the theatre. Approximately one-third of the respondents had not been to any activity of culture or arts, ticketed or non-ticketed, and had never been on a holiday abroad. Based on these ratios as indicators of participation in the field of culture, it can be stated that a considerable number of prospective teachers were not introduced to the various fields of culture and arts.

Responses to the question concerning participation in cultural activities in the last year were “a few times”. This range of cultural participation was populated mostly by visits to exhibitions, galleries, and museums. 63% of the respondents specified that they had visited exhibitions, galleries, and museums a few times in the last year. These were followed by visits to the cinema with 48.8%; to the theatre with 47.7%; and to concerts with 42.1%. When considered from all aspects, cultural participation among prospective teachers was observed not to have attained the expected level. This finding was consistent with the findings of the research conducted by Çam and Çam (2018) on the level of participation in social and cultural activities among the students at a university in Ankara.

The differences between groups in terms of cultural participation were analysed through independent groups t-test and one-way variance analysis. Table 3 shows prospective teachers’ participation in various cultural activities by their classes.

Table 3: Participation in cultural activities by class

Class	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t	p
Freshman	294	1.2381	.73278	527	1.120	.263*
Senior	240	1.1708	.65327			

\*p>0.05

The findings on the participation of the respondents in cultural activities by class indicated that first-year students (sample mean=1.2381) boasted a higher level of participation in cultural activities when compared to the senior students (sample mean=1.1708). However, no statistically significant difference was determined between freshmen and senior students in terms of participation in cultural activities [ $t(527)=1.120, p>.05$ ]. This finding may be interpreted to point out the lack of

any positive impact from the educational process at the university on the participation of prospective teachers in cultural activities.

A one-way variance analysis was performed to identify the differences, if any, in the cultural participation patterns observed among the prospective teachers with respect to the parental educational level, working status, and income level. Table 4 shows prospective teachers' participation in various cultural activities by parental educational level.

Table 4: Results of One-Way Variance Analysis (ANOVA) on participation in cultural activities by maternal educational level

<b>Mother's Educational Level</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><math>\bar{X}</math></b>	<b>SD</b>
(1) Illiterate	38	1.18	.72
(2) Literate Only (No Degree)	13	1.00	.00
(3) Elementary School Graduate	222	1.12	.55
(4) Secondary School Graduate	91	1.26	.77
(5) Graduate of High School or Equivalent	115	1.22	.66
(6) Two-Year Degree	9	1.22	.66
(7) Bachelor's Degree	29	1.34	.76
(8) Master's Degree	5	3.20	2.28
Total	522	1.20	.70

<b>Source of Variance</b>	<b>Sum of Square</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Meaningful Difference (LSD)</b>
Between Groups	22.77	7	3.254	7.182	.000*	1 - 8
Within Groups	232.87	514	.453			2 - 8 3 - 8 4 - 8
Total	255.65	521				5 - 8 6 - 8 7 - 8

\* $p < 0.05$

Table 4 reveals a statistically significant difference in the participation of prospective teachers in cultural activities with respect to the maternal educational level [ $F(7-514) = 7.182, p < .05$ ]. According to the ensuing post hoc LSD multiple comparison test, the level of participation in cultural activities was higher among the prospective teachers whose mothers had a master's degree than among all other maternal educational levels. The consistent reflection of the group with the highest maternal educational level (sample mean = 3.20) on the cultural participation level of their children pointed to the importance of the cultural capital accumulated by the family in the transference of cultural dispositions. Similarly, the paternal educational level also created

differences in participation in cultural activities (Table 5).

Table 5: Results of One-Way Variance Analysis (ANOVA) on participation in cultural activities by paternal educational level

<b>Father's Educational Level</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><math>\bar{X}</math></b>	<b>SD</b>
(1) Illiterate	7	1.28	.75
(2) Literate Only (No Degree)	7	1.14	.89
(3) Elementary School Graduate	136	1.07	.49
(4) Secondary School Graduate	88	1.25	.69
(5) Graduate of High School or Equivalent	139	1.18	.54
(6) Two-Year Degree	32	1.28	.68
(7) Bachelor's Degree	84	1.22	.75
(8) Master's Degree	13	3.76	1.01
(9) PhD	2	4.00	4.24
Total	508	1.20	.68

<b>Source of Variance</b>	<b>Sum of Square</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Meaningful Difference (LSD)</b>
Between Groups	22.63	8	2.829	6.515	.000*	1 - 9
Within Groups	216.66	499	.434			2 - 8 / 9 3 - 8 / 9 4 - 8 / 9 5 - 8 / 9 6 - 8 / 9 7 - 8 / 9 8 - 9
Total	239.297	507				

\*p<0.05

Table 5 reveals a statistically significant difference in the participation of prospective teachers in cultural activities with respect to the paternal educational level [F(8-499)= 6.515, p<]. According to the ensuing post hoc LSD multiple comparison test, the level of participation in cultural activities was higher among the prospective teachers whose fathers had a master's or PhD degree than among the other paternal educational levels. The higher level of cultural participation observed among the prospective teachers with a master's (sample mean = 3.76) or PhD (sample mean = 4.00) degree on their paternal side was indicative of the importance of the cultural capital of the family as a parameter for their children's achievement of a cultural disposition and their transference of it to their lives. In terms of the maternal and paternal working status, however, no statistically significant difference in participation in cultural activities was observed among the groups (Table 6 and Table 7).

Table 6: Results of One-Way Variance Analysis (ANOVA) on participation in cultural activities by maternal working status

<b>Mother's Working Status</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><math>\bar{X}</math></b>	<b>SD</b>
(1) Out of work, unemployed	368	1.19	.62
(2) Retired worker	19	1.36	.95
(3) Retired public servant	14	1.21	.57
(4) Permanently employed in public sector	35	1.28	.92
(5) Temporarily employed in public sector	7	1.28	.48
(6) Permanently employed in private sector	29	1.10	.40
(7) Temporarily employed in private sector	17	1.29	.77
(8) Self-employed	24	1.29	1.30
(9) No regular employment, day jobs	12	1.33	.88
Total	525	1.21	.70

<b>Source of Variance</b>	<b>Sum of Square</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>
Between Groups	1.61	8	.201	.405	.918*
Within Groups	256.49	516	.497		
Total	258.10	524			

\* $p > 0.05 F_{(8-516)} = .405$ 

Table 7: Results of One-Way Variance Analysis (ANOVA) on participation in cultural activities by paternal working status

<b>Father's Working Status</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><math>\bar{X}</math></b>	<b>SD</b>
(1) Out of work, unemployed	21	1.04	.38
(2) Retired worker	91	1.26	.81
(3) Retired public servant	51	1.07	.52
(4) Permanently employed in public sector	117	1.26	.77
(5) Temporarily employed in public sector	9	1.22	.83
(6) Permanently employed in private sector	64	1.07	.48
(7) Temporarily employed in private sector	23	1.13	.34
(8) Self-employed	115	1.31	.84
(9) No regular employment, day jobs	24	1.04	.20
Total	515	1.20	.70

<b>Source of Variance</b>	<b>Sum of Square</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>
Between Groups	5.21	8	.651	1.321	.230*
Within Groups	249.55	506	.493		
Total	254.76	514			

\* $p > 0.05 F_{(8-506)} = 1.321$ 

The absence of a significant difference in participation in cultural activities arising from the maternal and paternal working status may stem from the homogenous distribution of the group in socio-cultural terms. Nevertheless, the income level of the family, which was indicative of financial resources available for participation in cultural activities, created a significant difference in participation in cultural activities

among the groups (Table 8).

Table 8: Results of One-Way Variance Analysis (ANOVA) on participation in cultural activities by income level

Household Income	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
(1) TRY0-1000	24	1.04	.20
(2) TRY1001-2000	97	1.06	.55
(3) TRY2001-3000	143	1.12	.51
(4) TRY3001-4000	125	1.28	.75
(5) TRY4001 or higher	131	1.31	.83
Total	520	1.19	.67

Source of Variance	Sum of Square	DF	Mean Square	F	P	Meaningful Difference (LSD)
Between Groups	5.69	4	1.423	3.191	.013*	2 – 4
Within Groups	229.68	515	.446			2 – 5
Total	235.38	519				3 – 5

\* $p < 0.05$

Table 7 points to a significant difference in participation in cultural activities with respect to the income level of the family [ $F(4-515) = 3.191, p < .05$ ]. According to the ensuing post hoc LSD test, the level of participation in cultural activities was higher among the prospective teachers with a familial income level of TRY3001-4000 (sample mean=1.28) or of and above TRY4001 (sample mean=1.31) than among those with a familial income level of TRY1001-2000 (sample mean=1.06). Furthermore, the prospective students with a familial income level of or over TRY4001 (sample mean=1.12) boasted a higher level of participation in cultural activities than those with a familial income level between TRY2001 and TRY3000 (sample mean=1.12). This finding established the association between cultural capital and economic capital.

## Discussion and conclusion

Schools and teachers play a critical role in the process of cultural reproduction. In this context, the study analysed the current status of cultural participation among prospective teachers, who each assume an important role in the educational dimension, a determining factor for the future of the field of culture and arts, with the aim of deriving certain conclusions for the future. The study identified a low level of cultural engagement among prospective teachers and a correlation between such a level and their respective sociocultural environments

and the socioeconomic levels they represent. Bourdieu considers the combination of various types of capital including economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital as total capital and indicates that distinct classes and class fractions exhibit a breakdown shaped by such global capital volume (Bourdieu, 2015). The great majority of prospective teachers in this research were positioned in the lower socioeconomic level by reason of their indicators of parental educational level, working status, and income level. In relation to this, it can be stated that the cultural capital volume of their families was also limited. Bourdieu (1986) emphasizes that individuals born to upper-class and intellectual families naturally have access to rich cultural capital and accumulate their cultural capital from birth (Bourdieu, 1986). The low levels of economic and cultural capital observed as clearly interrelated findings among the families of prospective teachers inevitably affected their familiarity, predisposition, tastes, and preferences in the field of culture and arts. The data obtained from the question on the parental educational levels among the prospective teachers pointed out rather low cultural capital among the families. When considered as the priority area in the habitus and predispositions that shape the familial cultural capital volume, the great majority of prospective teachers were observed to have been deprived of the resources necessary to accumulate such capital. As a matter of fact, Bourdieu (1986) associates access to cultural production with an accumulation that requires both economic and cultural capital. It is necessary for pre-service teachers who are at lower socio-economic levels to make efforts to acquire cultural capital through education and learning, which is necessary for the realization of cultural production and participation. Since cultural capital is one of the important factors that determine the position of people in the social space together with economic capital (Bourdieu, 2015a), the cultural capital of teachers can be determinant both in their class mobility and in their transformative roles for their students. The fact that the cultural capital acquired by the teachers from their families is deprived of artistic fields such as painting, music, literature, etc. takes away the opportunities of enriching the cultural capital of the students from the lower class at school and causes the reproduction of their class position in the social space. Thus, teachers also play a role in the school's reproduction of existing social inequalities (Bourdieu, 2015a; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2015; Dumais, 2002) by fixing their own social positions.



Even though the families of prospective teachers were regarded as an economically and culturally homogenous group, the class fractions that arose from the educational level and working status of the families were observed to create differences in cultural participation. Habitus and predispositions, representing cultural consumption etc. were shaped in line with the capital volume and structure in each class and each class fraction (Bourdieu, 2015). The breakdown observed in the group with parents with master's degrees revealed a higher level of cultural participation among this minority group of prospective teachers, which constitutes an example of the transference of cultural capital volume shaped by the societal background. The difference created by the paternal educational level and monthly income in participation in cultural activities confirmed the sociological arguments explained by Bourdieu with the concepts of habitus and predisposition on the basis of cultural and economic capital. This finding was consistent with the findings of the studies addressing the level of cultural capital by class background and the association between class and cultural consumption (DiMaggio, 1982; Katz-Gerro, 2002; Lodrik, 2013; Robson, 2003; Wright, 2012). The studies of Bourdieu on the association between predispositions in the world of arts and culture and social background reflect the transference of cultural capital between generations. The weak relationship observed among prospective teachers with cultural and artistic activities may be associated with their belonging to the lower and middle classes in terms of their class background.

The cultural predispositions that were not grounded in the family were observed not to have been achieved by prospective teachers during their educational process. The absence of a significant difference between freshmen and senior students in terms of cultural participation may be interpreted to indicate that the process of university education failed to create a positive effect on prospective students with respect to their participation in cultural activities. Prospective students coming from lower-class families in terms of their social background suffered from a fixed position on the societal plane by reason of the combination of low cultural capital with the current structure and functioning of the educational system. Schools are as influential an institution as the family in terms of socialisation. If a school is sensitive towards inequalities from the perspective of the curriculum, teachers, administrators etc., which represents the school dynamics, it may allow the groups that are

at a disadvantage in cultural capital by reason of their class background to bridge such gaps. Otherwise, a school will reproduce the unequal distribution in cultural capital, which represents one dimension of inequalities in social life. The school constitutes the priority environment that may allow individuals who have not been able to develop a predisposition to participate in cultural activities to substitute such shortcomings. Nevertheless, arts education cannot find any room for flourishing on such grounds as arts education being excluded from priority areas in educational and cultural policies, the resources allocated to this field remaining rather limited, the lack of institutional infrastructure and capacity, the shortage of art teachers and the restricted role of arts in teacher training (IKSV, 2014). This bottleneck, in turn, narrows down the channels available for individuals from lower-class families to achieve cultural capital and results in the reproduction of the already established position of members of this class in society.

Informal learning takes place more than these learning styles in formal and non-formal education environments (Harrison, 2003). As hubs of knowledge generation, universities may be stated to achieve institutionalisation up to the extent of their support to and from the process of culture generation. Accordingly, it is important for culture, arts, and sports to be positioned as inherent elements of the quality of life on campuses (Dündar, 2015). When considered in the specific context of teacher training, there is a prominent need for a curriculum and a structure that will instil knowledge, skills, and motivation among prospective teachers for the field of culture and arts. The undergraduate education for prospective teachers in Türkiye is shaped around three fields: subject-specific education, vocational knowledge, and general knowledge. Contents relevant to culture and arts may be considered in the context of general knowledge. However, general knowledge is the most disregarded field and is not provided with a proportional weight among the fields in teacher training in Türkiye (Sagdıç, 2020). Faculties of education must pursue the goal of supporting the individual development of prospective teachers with their programmes and events (Özcan, 2011). One means available to reach this goal would be to create a curriculum to educate prospective teachers in general knowledge (Sagdıç, 2020). Nevertheless, the neoliberal reforms developed in the West have triggered a restructuring in the teacher training systems in Türkiye. Following the year 1997, teacher training programmes were

trapped in the field of expertise and offered training on the culture of teachers merely serving as lecturers rather than focusing on allowing prospective teachers to achieve the scientific perspective to prioritise their intellectual and sociocultural development (Güven, 2014:58-59). When education is shaped around tests, questions, exams and scores, teaching is reduced to technical intermediary manpower in the market rather than being an educator, and it is transformed into an element that only conveys information (Fredriksson, 2004; Özsoy and Ünal, 2010). All these reduce the autonomy of the teacher in the current neoliberal era (Carpenter, 2012) and pull the teachers to an anti-intellectual basis. This reduces the teacher to a technician in Bourdieu's argument that the school does not create equality of opportunity and plays a role in the reproduction of social inequalities (Bourdieu, 2015a; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2015).

## **Suggestions**

The present research study offers data on the inadequacy of cultural participation among prospective teachers in Türkiye and on the relevant socioeconomic context. The research study is limited to the data collected from prospective teachers. Future studies may address a more comprehensive scope in terms of content, incorporating various dimensions relating to culture, under the concept of cultural capital developed by Bourdieu. On the other hand, an ethnographic research agenda may be promoted as regards the sources and patterns of the culture of learning in society.

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### **About the author**

***Peri Tutar*** completed a master and doctorate in Ankara University, Faculty of Education Sciences, Department of Lifelong Learning and Adult Education. He is working at the Ministry of National Education, Directorate-General for Lifelong Learning. His research interest include lifelong learning theory and practice, critical pedagogy, informal learning, gender studies, education of immigrants, education and equality.

### **Contact details**

Email: *peri.tutar@gmail.com*

**Book review**

**Transformative teaching and learning in further education: Pedagogies  
of hope and social justice**

Rob Smith and Vicky Duckworth

Reviewed by Margaret Malloch, Victoria University

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Locality, transformation, and going beyond the system are key messages in Rob Smith and Vicky Duckworth's affirming study of further and adult education. To be able to achieve these in a more extensive further and adult education system, it is necessary to address the exigencies of the current policy agenda of cuts, reviews and narrowing of offerings and overcome them. At one end of the policy spectrum, this education system emphasises productivity with a transmission form of teaching and learning, and at the other, there is, to an extent, a focus on transformative education and the learners themselves.

As explained in Alan Tuckett's foreword, this work was inspired by the Further Education transforming lives and communities in 21st Century Britain Project, in which tutors and students shared, on video, the impact of learning and teaching experience in further learning. The project was conducted in the latter years of the second decade of this century.

It challenges education for the reproduction of social inequality through the provision of stories of hope, resilience, determination, and capability, which together point to the possibilities for an improved model of further and adult education which could contribute also positively to the economy and society.

There is a binary between a bigger picture of economic demands for a skilled workforce, with young adults undertaking training for the workforce, in a bureaucratic system bounded by pressures to report numbers, participation and assessments and the everyday experience of teachers working positively and seeing their students 'learn, grow, thrive and seeing their lives change' (Smith and Duckworth, 2022, p.2). This is in contrast to the British systemic emphasis on funding, accountability, and performance (FAP), a system familiar to Australian readers.

The authors are inspired by Jarvis' identification of a 'moral relationship' in teaching in adult education, to encourage and facilitate achievement of potential. (Jarvis, 2004, p195 in Smith and Duckworth, 2022, p.4). There is a conceptualisation of transformation as a social good, for social and economic benefits and to contribute to social equality and justice. There is also an appropriate acknowledgement that not all further education is transformational.

The book is organised into an introduction to the project, the policy context, and the methodological approaches. The voices of the students and teachers are a key element.

The key themes of transformative teaching and learning and social justice, education leadership provide heart-warming stories of being valued for who they were, experiencing successes, working out study and pathway goals, and gaining opportunities for study, career, and individual and social life goals. These are then considered in relation to the binaries of an academic/vocational divide, with inequality and social division countered by social mobility. Leadership, governance, and the role of the teacher are key in buffering the students against the culture of funding, accountability, and performance-driven imperatives.

Theoretical underpinnings of transformative education with its emphasis on belief, hope, and care are explored. Transformative teaching and learning are defined further, exploring theoretical understandings. The final chapter 'What needs to be done' to enhance

transformative education, argues for increased funding, leadership changes, and the importance of the local. There is a case put forward for creating a space for individual development and for a positive impact on the wider society.

The mixed methods research facilitated gaining the stories of students, their teachers, families, friends, community, and employers. Surveys were also employed to check the themes emerging from the narratives in a broader context. Videos of discussions went onto the project website, a central point for the project, which enabled qualitative data for knowledge production to be presented and shared. There was a tangible demonstration of positive communication and the development of meaning. This approach is a thoughtful example of how digital technology can be used for qualitative research rather than as a means for collecting quantitative data for assessment and comparisons.

The work is underpinned by a consideration of a theoretical lens, particularly that of critical pedagogy drawing in the work of Freire and Giroux.

The researchers' own journeys demonstrated the importance of policies and the opportunities afforded by further education. The research project learners' stories presented and analysed in the book illustrate the value of support from teachers, family, employers, organisations, and communities.

Case studies of individuals provided accounts of the impact on symbolic violence, labelling and streaming, exclusion, and being ignored. Students expressed negative feelings about their schooling experiences, which left them feeling failures and with their self-identities needing to be restored. Obstacles such as health, language, finances, and family responsibilities had to be overcome to achieve educational and career goals. The importance of being valued, recognised, and inspired contributed to the formation of positive identities. The narratives are heart-warming accounts of growth and achievement, by individuals and with extension, to family and community development.

These transformations of both young and mature-aged learners in moving from negativity to learning to becoming confident students, workers and family and community members were supported by the flexibility of further and adult education. Further Education has

had to survive the neoliberal period of privatisation, competition, marketisation, and a time of pressure on institutions to perform with little scrutiny as to quality as ‘skills providers’. It is described as a time of people in further and adult education being seen ‘as cogs in the service of employers and the national economy, a view that sees people as objects to be used’ (Smith and Duckworth, 2022, p.15). There is a need for policy and funding reform, but despite this transformative education is still evident.

Leadership would focus on action rather than role; teachers would focus on the learners as people with experience and futures whilst leading through mentoring. Teachers’ autonomy contributes to creativity and positivity, students’ autonomy to feeling competent.

The authors argue for increased funding for a form of education that is valuable to individual citizens and their wider communities, and which should be linked to wider socio-economic policy, and with a focus on social justice.

The Covid 19 pandemic has heightened awareness of social differences, and stronger further education and training could address these positively. In stepping away from the tensions and restrictions of funding, accountability and performance, transformative teaching and learning could make positive contributions to a new holistic space featuring lifelong learning and a vision of a democratic society. This book reminds us of where we have been, where we are currently struggling to maintain and where we might be.

**Smith, R., and Duckworth, V., Transformative Teaching and Learning in Further Education Pedagogies of Hope and Social Justice, Policy Press, 2022**

**Book review**

**Online teaching and learning in higher education during COVID-19**

Roy Chan, Krishna Bista, Ryan Allen

Reviewed by Lei Xia, Jiangsu College of Engineering and  
Technology, China

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Online teaching and learning in higher education during COVID-19 is a compilation of research done by individuals from faculty and students and highlights the impact it had nationally and regionally in general but in particular the higher education sector. Its 17 chapters reflect the resilience of faculty, students, and administration. It further reflects the problem-solving of administration, the efficiency of policymakers, the commitment of all relevant stakeholders, to ensure that the academic program continued, and lastly, it reflects the students' discipline to continue their studies. Further research to be done also forms part of the book. More importantly, it provides insight into the widening gap in digital online education between countries and specifically the education institutions, and their capacity to render optimal digital learning and teaching service.

The book consists of 16 short reviews from professors, directors of institutes, researchers, and lecturers. It is followed by a foreword that highlights the book as a symbol of hope to manage future epidemics,

setting the context and tone of the 17 chapters. Chapter 1 gives a summary of each chapter and here the editors ask the question, 'Are online and distance learning the future in global higher education?'

Part 1 consists of 5 chapters that discuss the effectiveness of learning, assessing, and teaching, during and after the pandemic. Chapter 2 examines how training in designing online courses and pedagogy was the starting point when COVID-19 occurred, while Chapter 3 shows the disparity in the effectiveness of remote teaching within universities. Here Linda Dam uses social media as a method and discusses the important debates for qualitative analyses. In my view, this qualitative method is important because emerging themes besides the main themes give more in-depth insight into the social variables of disparity in remote teaching. Chapter 5 uses a similar methodology as in Chapter 3 by exploring the narrative inquiry to discuss challenges the authors came across in their research about students working from home while using different multimedia tools to interact. Chapter 4 and 6 unpacks the assessment methods. Methods such as live chat and video conferencing as strategies for online testing were added for the effectiveness of assessments. My question here was whether the outcome was successful and in Chapter 6 the authors investigated whether the authentic assessment was better or not at RMIT University in Vietnam. However, there is a gap in this chapter and it is a comparative study of assessments with a university in a developed country. The strength of this part is pointing out, after extensive research by all the authors, the positive and negative variables in an innovative form of the phenomenon of distance learning and online teaching. For instance, the book points out how these trends will be more successful in the future in the long term given the normalization and adaptation of various methods and strategies being applied in higher education globally.

Part 2 emphasizes the impact distance education had on students, access for students to online teaching and learning, and how students were socially inclusive during COVID-19. This part is the most important part of the book to me because it speaks to very pertinent global social issues about online higher education. For example, in Chapter 7 the authors highlight the limited access to remote learning in developing countries and indicate how the use of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms narrowed the gap between the haves and the have-nots. Chapters 8 and 9 explore limitations on international



students, vulnerable students, and underrepresented students. Chapter 10 is the highlight of this part. A developing country in Africa, Botswana, is at the centre of this study because of the use of ICTs which might have contributed to social exclusion and digital inequality in higher education during the global pandemic. The study about Russia and inequality in technology in Chapter 11 is a phenomenon in various countries in Africa, Asia, and South America. Africa is the continent with the most social problems and technology is one of them. Houses are overcrowded in some parts of each country and studying at home is a challenge like it is in Russia. Furthermore, in Russia, there is poor internet connection but in parts of Africa there is no internet at all, so online learning is an impossible phenomenon. However, there is a paradigm shift post-COVID-19 in developing countries and this is the availability of the internet, technology, and more resources for online teaching and learning.

The third part includes case studies about teaching and learning remotely during the pandemic and long-term lessons. Various countries' studies are included in this part, for instance, Hong Kong, India, Australia, and the United Arab Emirates. Chapter 13, about autoethnography, provides readers with a better understanding of diversity within narratives in online communities. A paradigm shift is discussed in Chapter 14, from face-to-face teaching to a rise in virtual teaching in Hong Kong. It could have been more insightful if this paradigm shift could have been compared with a developing country. All this could have shown the implications of these paradigm shifts in developed and developing countries. Chapter 15 and 17 examines public universities and private universities. The example of an Indian private university analyses the data surveyed from 106 students to document the pros and cons of mainstream online learning during COVID-19. The author concludes this study and argues that the norms of lockdown and social distancing might change the future methods of higher education. The public higher institutions discussed in Chapter 17 include a theoretical framework where the author uses diffusion innovation theory. The author concludes that the method which is a blended learning model is ideal for higher education in the UAE. An elaboration on the reimagining of teacher education in Australian universities highlights hindrances and benefits post-COVID-19. The authors argued that these changes were reimagined and necessary in the online sphere.

An epilogue follows the 17 chapters where the editors indicate five commonalities and overarching variables. A few questions among others, which guide the book are, how do we support students in general, but vulnerable ones in particular for intercultural learning, how do we continuously engage alumni, staff, faculty, and students in enhancing online relationships, and lastly, how are field base and experiential learning remote courses designed?

The compilation of studies contributes to the knowledge capital to empower administrations, families, policymakers, educators, researchers, and practitioners. The advice, new ideas, and principles could be implemented in the academic years to come. Likewise, readers benefit tremendously from this relevant book during COVID-19 and will continue to benefit in the future. While the book focuses on a few countries, a few studies from Sub-Saharan Africa could have given more insight into the social, cultural, economic, and political phenomena of online education during COVID-19 in higher education institutions. I view this omission as a huge gap within this book because it could have given more insight into unequal access to communication technologies, especially affordability. What also should have been highlighted more is the transformation in digital and institutional culture and the investment in it. In my view, access to online teaching was and is still unequal.

A few changes could be made to this book. Add Chapter 18 as a chapter with statistics about Sub-Saharan African access to online teaching. Another chapter should highlight how the West is impacting negatively education in Africa by having conditions attached to aid that is not at times benefitting education. Indigenous communities are especially disadvantaged by the West. Other variables include age, gender, race, ethnicity, minority groups, and lower-income groups. These further studies should include action plans on how to design courses online that could be free and without the requirement of Wi-fi usage and to enhance students' social and emotional development.

**Online teaching and learning in higher education during COVID-19, by Roy Chan, Krishna Bista, Ryan Allen, London & New York, Routledge, 2022, 266 pp., (Paperback), ISBN 978-0367647155**

**Online forum:**  
**Adult learning education on climate justice**  
**Wednesday, 20 September 2023**

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## **Context**

In recent years, the importance of adult learning education focused on climate justice has gained momentum in Australia and the world. In Australia, we have seen the impact of climate disruption with more frequent catastrophic weather events such as floods and fires contributing to the displacement of people from housing and local communities and the subsequent effects on the environment and non-human species. In 2021, the Australian Journal of Adult Learning (AJAL) engaged prominent researchers in this area, Associate Professor Hilary Whitehouse and Professor Bob Stevenson to edit a special edition focusing on climate justice education and how adult learning education is currently responding to the call for action on climate change. As they noted in their editorial ... “In her recent book *Humanity’s Moment*, Australian scientist Joëlle Gergis (2022), a lead author of the 2022 Sixth IPCC Report, documents the overwhelming scientific evidence of a rapidly worsening ecological crisis” (Whitehouse and Stevenson, 2022). The special edition of AJAL highlights research and scholarship from Australia and a South African-led international collaboration responding to the impact of climate change, from issues related to popular education and social movement activism on climate change to affective dimensions of grappling with the social trauma of the climate crisis and the need for an emergent curriculum on climate justice education for educators and activists. The special edition includes practice-based papers on teaching climate

justice in the classroom and working with discomfort and emotions using pedagogies that engage students and teachers in dialogue on climate justice.

## **Purpose**

The seminar aims to bring adult educators together to engage on matters of climate justice education and to hear about current scholarship and practices from the authors of the special edition.

## **Participants**

- Assoc. Professor Tracey Ollis (MC)
- Professor Emerita Shirley Walters (keynote)
- Dr Lorraine Larri (panel)
- Professor Emerita Annette Gough (panel)
- Dr Tania Leimbach (panel)
- Dr Jennifer Kent (panel)
- Assoc. Professor Hilary Whitehouse (panel facilitator)
- Assoc. Professor Robert B. Stevenson (panel facilitator)

## **Time**

Wednesday 20 September 2023, 4.00 pm to 5.30 pm (AEST)

## **Registration**

<https://ala.asn.au/adult-learning-education-on-climate-justice/>