

AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT LEARNING

Volume 63, Number 3, November 2023

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From the Guest Editors' desk
Contributions of workplace experiences to adults'
lifelong learning

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Across the lifespan, working age adults' experiences within and through their work and workplaces make a range of contributions to their ongoing learning and development. Early in their work lives, these experiences variously assist them in identifying the kinds of occupations and work that they want to engage in or decide they are inconsistent with their personal goals and capacities. Those experiences can also

assist these adults develop the occupational capacities and workplace competencies necessary to be effective in working life, sustain their employment and advance their worklife careers. That is, they have the capacity and potential to support their employability across working life. The educative qualities of workplace experiences also can assist in making decisions about transitions and fresh directions, including those beyond working life. Indeed, beyond paid work, many adults' activities post their working lives are shaped by worklife experiences, the capacities they developed, and how they shape adults' sense of self subjectivity. All of these emerge through and across working life. Moreover, beyond their personal learning and development, through experiences across working life, including their voluntary and community-based work activities contributions can benefit their communities, in terms of the goods and services they provide and making viable and sustaining local institutions, including private and public sector enterprises.

Of course, those worklife learning experiences can also be either positive or negative, educative or mis-educative, supportive and inclusive or marginalising and alienating, and also can either realise or frustrate these adults' key life goals. So, more than simply the acquisition, further development and transformation of sets of occupational capacities, those experiences also do much to potentially frame adults' sense of self, worth and life trajectories. In all, these experiences are central to adult learning and development. Given the duration, intensity and ubiquity of adults' learning experiences in and through work and across working life, they stand to be potentially far more consequential than those offerings referred to as lifelong education: usually the provision of taught courses.

It follows then that, in the context of adult learning and considerations of adult education, this special issue seeks to elaborate on the contributions of workplace experiences to adults' lifelong learning broadly. It comprises contributions that identify and elaborate the kinds of goals that adults have for their learning, and the range of educative experiences that can be found in and through work activities and the alignment between these and the kinds of learning and development that might arise for adults.

Consequently, the articles comprising this special issue focus on

capturing and illuminating the experiences provided in and through work and how they contribute to adult learning and development more generally, as well as those associated with occupational capacities and subjectivities and workplace competence. In this way, the special issue is not about workplace learning per se, but rather the kinds of experiences and legacies arising from adults' participation in work practice and the activities and interactions that comprise working life.

In overview, the nine contributions of the special issue are as follows:

In his article *Analyzing work and life course learning under capitalism using a mind in political economy approach*, Peter Sawchuck discusses worklife learning in terms of the trajectories, transitions and turning points that comprise adults' life courses. It is premised upon the view of both subjective and objective accounts of those life courses and how that comes to shape and meaning for adults biographically. In essence, beyond accounting for the relationship between the inherent problems of work and biographical meaning, it accommodates the relations between the experiences of work and adults' life course. This includes a consideration of processes of alienation and de-alienation that are implicit in the contradictions of power and control within capitalist political economy, culture and society. These processes are elaborated through the integration of a combination of key concepts—activity, occupation and dramatic *perezhivanie*— that are captured under the rubric of a “mind in political economy” approach.

The manuscript by Sarojni Choy and Anh Hai Le entitled *Workplace practices that support learning across working life* illuminates and elaborates the contributions to ongoing learning opportunities arising through workplace experiences that support individuals' employability across working life. Rather than focusing the analysis of that learning in the immediacy of a particular moment, it proposes ways of understanding how those experiences collectively contribute to the ongoing employability of working age adults across working life. It does so by drawing upon data from both worklife history interviews and a survey that provides the basis for advancing and discussing those contributions and working age adults' perspectives of workplace affordances. The findings from the interviews indicate work-based models of learning that help support workers' ongoing learning in, through and across their working lives such conceptions and models

are seen as being helpful for working age adults to maintain currency of knowledge and skills to sustain employment and make contributions to their work workplaces and communities who depend upon the goods and services they produce.

Educational attainment at a tertiary level has been increasing throughout the OECD with an emphasis on graduate learning outcomes and employment outcomes for graduates of tertiary and higher education programs. Natasha Tan et al draw on students' experiences of internships in post-secondary diploma courses in Singapore in the study entitled – Promoting student readiness for work-life through internships: Challenges and support. This work was supported by the Workforce Development Applied Research Fund (WDARF), a national-level fund offered by the SkillsFuture Singapore Agency under Grant [GA19-10]. The study involves a quantitative analysis of interview data to explore students' engagement in and readiness for work with a focus on adaptability and associated affordances and challenges. The authors draw on Giddens's structuration theory to examine the nexus of structure and agency. Numerous considerations are identified for both workplaces and education institutions to promote adaptability and to support students' effective transition to work. These include, but are not limited to the following: design, implementation and evaluation of internships; establishing supportive environments; enabling active engagement in work practices; being mentored; receiving feedback and guidance; and career planning and development.

The correlation between digital technologies and volunteers' learning features in this manuscript. Catherine Arden's study entitled – Social participation, altruism and learning opportunism: A phenomenography of adults' learning through workplace experiences in rural community volunteering – makes a significant contribution to the field of adult and workplace learning. It brings attention to volunteers from an Australian rural community engaged in a socio-technical learning community in a social enterprise. The project aimed to support individuals in the community to create and manage an online portal that would benefit and build the capacity of individuals and the community. Arden's study focuses on volunteers' community-based work experiences and their perceptions of what and how they learned through engagement in the collaborative socio-technical learning community. The findings of this phenomenographic study reveal the value and contribution of workplace

experiences for individual volunteers and the broader community, e.g., individual and group learning, agency, lifelong learning, and capacity-building.

As the learning needs of adults grow in the workplace and society, there is a need to understand the specificities of adult learning and how to support and guide it at work. In the article by Soila Lemmetty and her colleagues entitled – Learning at work in the light of andragogy: What assumptions characterize adult learners in the fields of technology and police work? – returns to the concept of andragogical theory to understand how that learning at and through work might be best supported and guided. The project presented and discussed in this article seeks to illuminate how assumptions arise about how learning amongst working age adults in the workplaces that were investigated. These include a consideration of how work is aligned with contemporary considerations of the andragogical perspective. Whilst finding that assumptions about andragogy are reflected in the data about workplaces as sites of learning, what was often lacking was the acknowledgement of the importance of sociality in that learning. Therefore, this study produces a seventh assumption in the andragogy theory, that of sociability, which is not recognized as strongly by the previous theory. The article concludes by summarizing four broad themes that describe adult learners engaged in police and technology work.

There are circumstances in which performance in work activities needs to be developed through work activities and interactions that are set outside of those in which those performances will be required. Emergency work provides a good example of that kind of work where the preparation for dealing with accidents, events and potential disasters needs to be prepared in advance. The article entitled – Vocational learning of incident commanders in tunnel fire safety work -- by Gabriela Bjørnsen and her colleague reports and discusses one such form of work-based preparation. The focus is on how to prepare firefighters for responding to fires in road tunnels. The focus of the article is on an evaluation of the effectiveness of a pilot course developed for incident commanders involved in tunnel fire safety work. That evaluation leads to discussions about the mechanisms most likely to promote or inhibit the learning and development required to prepare these workers for those tasks and this includes aspects that may not be wholly understood or known about such as the sources of the fire, the

number of vehicles and individuals impacted by it and how the safety of those individuals and extinguishing the fire need to be addressed.

Helen Jossberger and Miriama Schlachtová examine the role of feedback to residents in the medical workplace. Their qualitative study entitled – Specialists’ views on feedback at the medical workplace – centres on the purpose and significance of feedback in the domain of radiology taken from the perspective of those giving feedback. Fifteen specialists from four hospitals were interviewed and asked how feedback had influenced their professional development and about their interactions with and provision of feedback to the residents. The authors note, that, to their knowledge, no empirical study in the domain of radiology has explored the perspectives of feedback providers. The authors note a mix of responses with acknowledgement of differences between daily feedback and performance-based feedback. Overall, the roles of feedback in the workplace were to guide radiology practice, to develop social skills, and to prepare residents for future independent specialist work. Integral to the feedback process was the transfer of “domain-specific knowledge”. For many of the specialists, their experiences as recipients of feedback in their residency formed the basis for their approaches to feedback. This prompted considerations of training on feedback, a structured approach to giving feedback and time allocated for the feedback. The study captures positive and negative understandings of and approaches to the provision of feedback in the workplace.

PhD students working in universities in Turkey and their experiences of informal workplace learning are the focus of the study by Emine Karaduman, Rukiye Bektas and Ozlem Unluhisarcikli in their article entitled – The experiences of doctoral students working in university settings. The authors interviewed ten PhD students employed at different universities, most of them in the role of research assistants. The study elucidates the value of informal learning in the workplace, challenging negative concepts of informal education arising from its comparison with formal learning. The experiences of the PhD students participation in daily activities, managing unexpected challenges, engaging socially with others, taking on new tasks, and collaborating with others contributed to their understanding of the workplace and business processes and their overall learning. The study also found some PhD students, whose work focused on administrative tasks with little support and few opportunities to participate in decision making,

reported feeling conflicted and demotivated. The findings of the study reveal the affordances and challenges associated with informal learning in the workplace relevant to individuals (PhD students) and organisations (universities).

The manuscript by Chunlin Yao entitled – Exploring the Effects of Working Practice in Cultivating Chinese University Teachers' Professional Identity – accordingly seeks to identify the contributions of working practice to generating higher education teachers' professional identity. It does this through analysis of individual interview data gathered from some of these teachers. Foundational here is that the rationale and purposes that the informants proposed for initially engaging in this work were centered on their interests and job satisfaction that reflect concerns about their sense of self. Yet, through participating in that work it is reported that from those initial conceptions their professional identities have changed significantly. This includes greater interest and focuses on their professional growth, all of which are central to their sense of self as working age adults. The findings also report the importance of the kinds of activities and interactions in and through their work that are likely to lead to the development of specific capacities to be effective in their work but also through the sociality of work have found support and helpfulness in being able to form and sustain an identity as university teachers. In these ways, what is proposed is that of all professional development opportunities it is the day-by-day engagement in work activities that are central to building and sustaining professional identities.

The articles in the special issue present an array of topics and areas of study by researchers from the northern and southern hemispheres. Individually and collectively they capture workplace experiences of adults and the educative experiences in and through work activities. We thank our colleagues for their contributions to the issue, sharing their rich and textured research with us.

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