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From the Editor's desk

Associate Professor Trace Ollis

We commence the April editorial of the journal with a tribute to the distinguished Professor, John Field, who recently died unexpectedly. Professor Field was a well-known and a highly respected figure in the field of adult and lifelong learning. His contributions to the scholarship and discipline of adult learning are monumental, and it's important for AJAL to mark his passing. Professor Sir Allan Tucket recently wrote a tribute to him, which AJAL has gratefully reproduced in full here.

Vale Professor John Field written by Professor, Sir Allan Tuckett.

John Field's sudden and untimely death is a major loss to the adult learning movement, and for me the loss of a dear colleague and friend. He brought warmth, generosity and curiosity to his dealings with everyone – As the flood of tributes on social media following his death testify, John was widely loved and respected by adult education academics and practitioners in the countries of the UK and across the world.

John was a distinguished academic and adult educator who made a very significant contribution to scholarship, through his own writing and collaborations, and through tireless work in supporting the development of the field, inside and outside universities.

He wrote or edited 17 books; had 100 or so peer reviewed journal articles and another 100 chapters, alongside a multitude of papers, reports, pamphlets and occasional pieces in the press.

He sat on a plethora of university committees, played a lead role in research assessment exercises, advised other universities across the globe on lifelong learning. He examined multiple theses in a wide variety of international universities, and sat on editorial committees,

All with a wry smile.

John had a significant impact in policy advocacy to government in the UK and internationally.

He was a member of the Fryer commission advising the 1997 Labour Government; a commissioner on the national independent inquiry into lifelong learning led by Tom Schuller 10 years later; seconded to government for the foresight study on Mental Capital and Well Being in 2008, and again worked with the 2016 Foresight project on skills and lifelong learning.

Internationally he worked with OECD, with the EU and with UNESCO where he was one of the writers of the 4th Global Report on Adult Learning and Education, and an adviser more widely.

His contributions were challenging and sympathetic. John was occasionally contrarian wary of a too comfortable consensus, sniffing out important if inconvenient evidence, but always supportive overall. As a teacher, mentor, supervisor, examiner or evaluator he could make complex ideas accessible, and consistently brought the happy combination of serious intellectual rigour alongside the ability to give confidence and agency to others.

John was fired by a strong sense of social justice, and a commitment to international solidarity.

I met him first in 1984 during the Miners' Strike, when we were both seeking ways that adult education could more effectively support working class men and women, and from 1988 when I was at NIACE he was adviser mentor or project leader for our work in seeking more and different chances for people failed by the system. Later he played the same role with Scotland's Learning Partnership.

Internationally he worked hard at the fall of the Berlin Wall to

strengthen solidarity with scholars in the old Soviet Bloc countries, and had long term alliances in Germany, as well as in Ireland.

John had a glittering career – first at Northern College, the Ruskin of the North, then Warwick – working with Chris Duke and Tom Schuller to set up a distinguished continuing education department, then Bradford to head a department; Ulster and a chair, back to Warwick and the first professorship in lifelong learning. Finally, to Stirling, where for 6 years he was Deputy Principal.

He was awarded an honorary doctorate in 2006 by the Open University. In 2014 he was inducted into the International Hall of Fame of adult educators. He was visiting professor at Cologne, Birkbeck, Warwick, Wolverhampton and was Emeritus Professor at Stirling when he died.

His books, on unemployed adults, education and the state; on lifelong learning in changing times, on social capital, on mental well being, on men's work camps are all impressive, and the core of his international reputation. But I loved the range of his curiosity – his exploration of the Lincolnshire Bat Observation Society, Men's Sheds, MOOCs, his love of twitter, his wonderful blog. He was a serious academic, but more importantly he was great fun.

April 2024 Edition editorial

The April edition of the Australian Journal of Adult Learning (AJAL) features refereed journal articles on various topics, including multiliteracies and adult learning in the arts, First Nation People cultural heritage work in the Budj Bim cultural landscape in south-western Victoria, successfully supporting students who are parents and returning to study, professional development and Vocational Education and Training (VET) practitioners and empowerment initiatives for Saudi women through VET. Additionally, the non-refereed or practice-based based articles from the field offer reflections on adult learning practices and processes throughout the journey of PhD research supervision.

This edition commences with an article by Susan Holloway and Patti Gouthro titled “Multimodal adult learning through arts-based organisations”. The article presents a national study on arts-based adult education organisations in Canada drawing on the philosophical framework of multiliteracies. A multiliteracies approach fosters cultural

and linguistic diversity, encouraging adults to thrive in adult learning literacy practices. The paper draws on a methodology of multiple case studies and constructivist grounded theory. It reveals a range of sites for literacy education, such as an art gallery, a museum and a chamber music orchestra. The importance of using creativity approaches in education has been noted in previous research, such as Dan Harris's (2014), work on creativity and education and in the public pedagogies literature of Jennifer Sandlin (2010) and others, noting the richness in its application and outcomes for learners, communities and society more broadly. As the authors observe, the research findings are considerable: "arts-based approaches can infuse the work of adult educators to engage adult learners in inclusive pedagogy and active citizenship".

The article by Tony Brown, titled "Recognising the Budj Bim cultural landscape as World Heritage: How a socio-material approach bridged the tangible-intangible heritage gap", outlines Indigenous-led heritage work that integrates political struggle, advocacy and history work in the processes of knowledge creation. Acknowledging Indigenous '*ways of knowing*' and some 60,000 years of knowledge regarding land conservation, protection and management of the country is crucial. In recognition of the significant work, in 2019, the Budj Bim cultural landscape was listed on the World Heritage Register. It is a significant achievement for the Gunditjmara People, who regained control of their traditional lands and recognition of the unbroken connection with the and extending back many years. As Brown notes, "It undermines a longstanding distinction made in heritage assessment between tangible (material) and intangible (immaterial) categories by instead seeing these as interdependent and 'constitutive entanglements' of everyday life". This article will be of great interest to AJAL readers, particularly those interested in the struggle for self-determination and land rights of Australian First Nations People.

Christopher Ward & Piper Rodd's paper, titled "PD: a professional deterrence? The financial cost and time commitment of professional development for VET practitioners in Western Australia", examines VET practitioner's professional development activities. The Australian VET Industry requires teachers to keep abreast of current practices and policy contexts in vocational education. With the VET system currently teaching more than four million students annually, the importance of maintaining a highly knowledgeable, skilled, and qualified sector cannot

be underestimated. The study tracked the professional learning activities of thirty teachers in the VET sector in Western Australia, which were primarily largely self-funded. The authors use human capital theory to interpret the data and draw the conclusion that the practitioners did not receive a significant return on their self-investment for the personally incurred cost of professional development. The authors argue that "...acts as a deterrent to working as a VET practitioner which has ramifications for training provider operational efficiency, and the wider VET sector".

The paper draws on data to reveal the tensions and contradictions between what the workforce is paid, the impact and the financial pressure on WA VET staff who self-fund their professional development in order to remain in the workforce. This study's findings are important in the current context of skill shortages in the VET workforce.

The paper "Empowering Saudi women through vocational skills" by Sarah Alajlan examines adult learning in a community setting for women in Saudi Arabia. The study aimed to discover the extent to which Saudi women were empowered through the vocational skills taught at educated neighbourhood programs during the time of COVID-19 pandemic. Aligned with the Saudi Vision 2030, the government encourages women to participate in the workforce, to address labour shortages and build the country's economy and society. The Learning Neighbourhood Program was first established in 2006, provides free courses in personal interest learning, computers, crafts, as well as literacy and employability skills. Whilst fifty per cent of Saudi women graduate from universities, only twenty-two percent of women participate in the workforce. The Learning Neighbourhood Program provides literacy, vocations, life and self-awareness skills and knowledge. As the author notes:

"These programmes were designed to extend the concept of adult education from literacy to lifelong learning, preparing individuals, especially women who are less fortunate in terms of education, to contribute to society's development; qualifying women for the labour market; providing women with the necessary skills to obtain financial self-sufficiency and to be independent learners; and enriching the work culture for women".

The Saudi Learning Neighbourhood Program is similar to the

personal interest learning that occurs in Australian Neighbourhood Houses, which have been widely cited as empowering for women and instrumental on participant opportunities for volunteering, work, further study and the health and well-being of participants (See Harrison, 2018, for example). The study results revealed Saudi women were empowered with the vocational skills acquired in educated-neighborhood programs. The research uncovered many of the challenges Saudi women faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, social isolation, coping difficulties, discontinued activities, safety precautions, and access to healthcare.

Our final refereed article for the April edition is titled “Supporting students who are parents to succeed in Australian higher education”, by Szalkowicz Giovanna and Lisa Andrewartha.

The article draws on empirical research in an Australian university and uncovers some of the struggles that students who are parents face while studying in higher education. The authors argue that parents who are students are largely “invisible” in universities, and little is known about the challenges they encounter. However, the authors contend that acknowledging their struggles is crucial and should be acknowledged in university strategic plans and access and equity policy to support underrepresented and first-in-family students. The analysis for this interpretative research draws on eighteen semi-structured interviews. The findings include an analysis of these parents’ motivations for studying, their self-identified strengths, and the participant’s perceived challenges to success.

Practitioner papers

The practitioner-based section of the journal engages with voices from the field reflecting on current practices in adult learning education. Barry Elsey’s paper “Advising senior management leaders on the doctoral research journey by applying traditional adult learning practices for industry contexts”. The paper eloquently reflects and explores the dialogical learning processes, emphasising learner-centredness that occurs in the higher degree by research space in the process of PhD supervision. Often underexamined in adult learning literature, supervision in the PhD process is often likened to an apprenticeship model based on master and practitioner ways

of ‘knowing and doing’ or “front-end loading” teaching and learning. Elsey’s paper reveals a contemporary approach PhD supervision, which is holistic, drawing on the expertise of the individual student and situating the knowledge development in the current workplace or industry setting under investigation. Elsey claims his ideas about adult learning and his background in liberal arts education helped to shape his practices. He suggests the PhD process resembles a shared mutual learning journey, where both the supervisor and PhD candidate learn in the engagement process.

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