

# AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT LEARNING

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

Associate Professor Trace Ollis

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We begin this editorial by noting changes in Ministerial portfolios with the most recent cabinet reshuffle in the Federal Albanese Government. Andrew Giles is now the Minister for Skills and Training, replacing Tony Burke; we look forward to seeing the Labor government's further advancement of adult and lifelong learning in Australia. The July issue of AJAL offers four refereed papers on a broad range of research related to adult learning education, from the role of academics advising on adult learners' transitions to university to an article on Bessie Harrison Lee's fight for suffrage that brings together adult learning and popular education traditions, highlighting the importance of adult learning, resistance and social change. Adult learning in the community theatre and arts education space is explored in an article on adult community education. Continuing the current research in the post-pandemic era is an article from Eswatini in Africa, examining the perceptions of adult learning for those with visual impairment in the pandemic era.

Our paper from the field, or "practice", outlines the practices of using "Eight Ways Pedagogy" and how adult educators can incorporate Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing through adult learning pedagogy. AJAL papers on practice are non-refereed articles, enabling adult educators and practitioners in the field to examine current trends in pedagogy, policy, and practice, passing on knowledge and skills of

current and past educators in the field and building a community of practice (Lave, 1991). The April edition includes reviews of two books on adult learning. The first **Making Connections: A Selection of Writings 1983 – 2009**, written by Delia Bradshaw (2022), reflects on a lifetime of being a teacher of adult learning and is reviewed by Ursula Harrison . The second book review on **Adult language education and migration: Challenging agendas in policy and practice** by Simpson and Whiteside (2015), examines the policy context of English language learning for adult migrants around the world and is reviewed by Kenneth Charles Lambo

The first article in the April edition, titled “**The experiences of an online academic advising approach supporting adult learners’ transition into an enabling program preparing them for university**” by McGovern, Crank & Green, outlines a transition program at a university. This mixed methods research notes the role of online academic advising support services for students transitioning to university, rather than the traditional academic advising support services traditionally provided in person and on campus. Transition programs provide equity and access to adult learners in higher education and contribute to democratising education in university spaces (see Biesta, 2009, for example). Research into University enabling programs has increased in recent years along with the massification of higher education and the increase of “first in family” students at universities (Jarvis, 2021). This is an important space for adult learning as students taking non-traditional pathways to higher education require support services with orientation and academic literacy to ensure a smooth transition. Nieuwoudt (2021) has noted, for example, the psychological stress for students who enter higher education programs through enabling programs. The authors argue in their paper that “Online modes of study are increasingly prevalent in higher education programs, including university-enabled programs”. This study outlines the design and evaluation of an online academic advising program that students believed had benefits and was a valuable service to provide support and advice to adult learners supporting the transition to higher education with access to support and timely information, assisting the development of student identity and a sense of belonging at university.

In the paper “**Bessie Harrison Lee's fight for Victorian Women's Suffrage in the late nineteenth century: Educating urban and**

**rural women on the democratic process**” by Jennifer Caligari, draws on the educational traditions of adult learning, popular education and public pedagogies (See Crowther, et al, 2005 & Sandlin, 2010, for example). Bessie Lee Harrison’s quest for the democratic right for women to vote via the women’s temperance movement in Victoria saw her use “multiple pedagogical methods”. She argues, that using the Women’s Christian Temperance Movement (WCTU) as a force for consciousness-raising enabled women “to visualise the possibilities of improving their lives through the democratic process.” These were not “radical” women by any means, the majority of the women were Christian conservatives. Nonetheless, as Caligari identifies, “The WCTU taught Lee the value of female-centred political action. The WCTU and Lee’s involvement successfully influenced the debate about women’s suffrage and contributed to the mobilisation of the international women’s movement.” The actions of individual and collective women’s mobilisation for change have a long history in the women’s movement and in the adult education literature on social movement learning and popular education (Clover, 2012). Often using incidental and informal education strategies to educate the citizenry about an issue of justice. Lee used strategies such as public speaking in town halls, outside public bars, private lounge rooms and in people’s homes, mobilising change through citizen-based direct action. As Caligari notes:

*“These spaces were the places of learning” .... the meeting places of the WCTU, whether private lounge rooms or church halls, enabled women to support each other in the political process of debate, addressing community issues, and devising strategic plans to improve the lives of women.”*

However, the author notes that Lee and the WCTU excluded Indigenous women and women of non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, thus contributing to the great silence of marginalised women, notable in the history of the women’s movement (Behrendt, 1993).

Continuing the themes of learning in community settings, Rob Townsend and Jeff Jones, in their article, **Adult, community education in acting and performance as personal development: “I can look people in the eye now!”** This paper considered theatre performance and creative arts courses delivered at the community level, for mature-aged adult learners in a changing

environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This article examines the processes of personal and relational transformation that occur as learners participate in community theatre productions. The data reveals the profound transformation of the participants from anxious, self-doubting adults to having experiences of empowerment, agency and confidence. This is reminiscent of transformative adult learning in the work of Jack Mezirow, who theorised about the significant transformation of the “self” and the “identity change” that occurs as learners embark on profound journeys of self-discovery (Illeris, 2014). The authors note the importance of the knowledge, skill and pedagogy of the teacher is essential in assisting adult learners in their journey of transformation. The paper provides a timely reminder of the importance of arts-based curricula and adult learning, including teacher pedagogies of care and support, which can transform adult learners’ lives.

Our final article for the edition is called, **Perceptions of adult learners with visual impairment throughout COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications for institutional assistance in Eswatini**, by Nomazulu Ngozwana. The paper observes the experience of students with a visual impairment during the Covid 19 pandemic, leading to students withdrawing from their course at a university in Eswatini Africa. The paper is a phenomenological study drawing on data from a small sample of three students, providing rich insights into these students' experiences. As noted in the paper these findings reveal issues of access and equity for students with a disability. “The findings revealed the themes of socialisolation, personal challenges, and lack of institutional assistance.” The paper outlines the importance of teachers embedding including pedagogy and practices in their teaching, noting: “The participants acknowledged the awareness of using technology during the COVID-19 pandemic: however, they stated the lack of devices, inadequate technology skills, and their reliance on sighted adult learners and peers to read the content for them.” The author calls for inclusive policies at Universities in Eswatini for students with visual impairment, particularly with the uptake of delivering courses with new technologies and online in the post-pandemic era.

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