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Australian Journal of Adult Learning
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From the Guest Editors' desk

Power, policies, and practices in adult literacies

Susan M. Holloway
Professor, University of Winsor, Canada

Patricia A. Gouthro
Professor, Mount Saint Vincent University, Canada

Guest editors: Susan M. Holloway, Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

Patricia A. Gouthro, Professor in the Faculty of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Introduction

The term "literacy" has shifted to "literacies" in the last 40 years as critical educational discourses recognise the multiplicity of learning experiences encompassed in the fields of New Literacy Studies, critical literacy, multiliteracies, and sociocultural approaches to additional language learning. The plurality of literacies speaks to the pressing

need to find relevant ways to communicate about increasingly complex issues in a fast-paced world. Each of these four areas of literacies draws attention to how power continues to shape and impact adult learning experiences. With a great sense of optimism, we introduce the articles published in this Special Edition on literacies that reveal critical and creative ways to embrace human dignity, communicate across a broad spectrum of mediums and genres, and recognise from an assets-based approach cultural and linguistic diversity. These articles build on contemporary research and practice in literacies happening across the world and act as a bellwether to address challenges that the future may hold.

Traditionally, literacy has been narrowly defined as the technical ability to read and write. This definition still holds great currency amongst policymakers and the general public in many countries, who also often believe in the premise of Human Capital Theory which perceives the main purpose of education is to be an investment for economic growth. Baptiste (2001) explains:

> *proponents of human capital theory assume that our world is an educational meritocracy in which a person's socio-economic status is limited presumably only by his or her educational investment…furthermore, human capital theorists construe social inequalities not as injustices, the result of exploitation and oppression, rather as natural and inevitable outcomes of a free market. (p. 195)*

Human Capital Theory continues to carry weight in informing policy development and in assessing the impact of literacy programs for adult learners. However, as Desjardins (2019) points out, there are challenges in using this framework because of inequities in power. For example, it is often difficult to tease out benefits to individual learners, as while investments in creating a more skilled labour force may lead to overall higher economic productivity, the returns on this investment may lead to greater benefits for employers who gain higher profits rather than individual workers, who may not see much of an increase in personal wages.

Jeounghee & Belzer (2021) argue that assessing the benefits of literacy and Adult Basic Education programs needs to go beyond Human Capital Theory's narrow focus on individual economic gains to a broader

human rights perspective. Elfert (2019), in her assessment of lifelong learning and the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), argues that while a 'human-rights based approach to adult education certainly would have much to contribute to 'transforming our world"' (p. 551), unfortunately, this has not been implemented through policies that instead focus more on employability skills. She notes the lack of resources allocated to literacy and adult education, particularly for marginalised groups, and argues that the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development have more interest in developing human capital rather than foregrounding learning as a human right. Literacy, in terms of supporting citizenship and social development is not prioritized. An increasingly neoliberal agenda for lifelong learning aligns with economic goals whereby support for adult education and literacy is perceived to be an individual rather than social responsibility (Fejes et al., 2018). Although Human Capital Theory and neoliberalism are challenges that adult educators must fight against, we believe that there are innovative, alternative pathways forward that the approaches to literacies discussed by the researchers and practitioners in this special edition help to elucidate.

In this special edition, we contend that New Literacy Studies, critical literacy, multiliteracies, and sociocultural approaches to additional language learning all play important roles in advancing theoretical ways to conceptualize literacy in the plural. They offer new perspectives on what counts as literacy as well as philosophical stances that theorize power relations embedded in communication practices and pragmatic pedagogical strategies to engage adult learners. Examples of practice reveal how educators are navigating current social contexts to retain a critical focus on learning and literacy. In what follows, we trace out some of the key concepts and research that has been done in each of these theoretical frameworks to consider how they contribute to a broader understanding of literacies in a lifelong learning context and lay the groundwork for the contributors' papers to this volume.

New literacy studies

What has shifted through the work in New Literacy Studies in the field of lifelong learning is a focus on language as a socially situated practice (Barton & Hamilton, 2000) – meaning that everyday communications such as sending a text, creating a playlist, or asking directions in another

language, contribute to how meaning is made and interpreted. Learning literacies in the plural means empowering adults to understand that they are *already* literate in a variety of ways through their prowess in social relationships in a variety of settings (knowing how to solve a mechanical problem in a car engine, barter in a food market, or care for young children). In similar non-formal learning environments, many of the original studies in New Literacy Studies used ethnography to outline and interpret literacy in a variety of settings (Heath, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Street, 1984).

Street's (2003) "autonomous" model questioned whether literacy taught as isolated cognitive skills would necessarily lead to presumed spillover benefits of greater success in life, whereas his "ideological" model scrutinized this ostensible "neutral and universal" (p. 77) characterization ascribed to literacy practice, and instead articulated language as socially situated and power laden. Unrau et al. (2019) elaborate on Street's theory when they observe:

> *A point worth underscoring is that viewing literacy instruction as ideologically situated does not require giving up on the cognitive aspects of reading and writing, nor on the technical skills associated with the autonomous model. Instead, the ideological model might be said to subsume the autonomous model and simultaneously incorporate an array of social, cultural, and political ways of knowing that account for seemingly absent but always present relations of power. (p. 8)*

New Literacy Studies continue to resonate with many literacy theorists and practitioners because, like the field of adult education itself, it looks beyond the parameters of formal schooling to recognise and champion lifelong learning. New Literacy Studies continue to play an important role in validating and providing critical interpretations of literacies in informal and non-formal adult learning contexts. Educators, learners, and policy makers need to consider that social contexts always play a role in literacy learning. For example, Golden and Lanza (2019) note that New Literacy Studies are "culturally sensitive, with literacy always embedded in socially constructed principles" (p. 255). They discuss how for older adult migrants "narratives of personal experience provide, furthermore, insight into how speakers utilize their linguistic resources to negotiate agency and power in their presentation and positioning

of the self in social experiences (p. 257). The technical skills of literacy are never learned in a vacuum, so teaching and learning literacy must acknowledge the role of social and cultural interactions and norms.

In this ongoing epistemological shift, New Literacy Studies have also significantly advanced our understanding of the larger societal implications of Web 2.0 technologies: "In a world where electronically produced text carries meaning, exclusion from digital technologies can have disempowering consequences – especially for life in the home, community and workplace" (Hamilton et al., 2012, p. 4). New Literacy Studies has also stemmed into a related field called "new literacies" which Gee describes as "involving digital media or popular-culture practices, and thus it goes beyond print literacy" (2012, p. 371). New literacies, while still largely drawing upon ethnography, place a greater emphasis on discourse analysis. The research approach of new literacies is squarely focused on the intertwining of technologies with literacy learning (Knobel & Lankshear, 2017) to look at, for instance, Actor-Network theory and interactive role play in online gaming; online chats in Xbox Live or learning through cellphones or Fanfiction. Many research studies explore the influence of adult community-based digital learning spaces (Smythe et al., 2023). For example, Crowther (2018) considers the unexpected outcomes of unofficial political campaign groups who utilised "the digital sphere with over 700 blog sites and social media groups providing a vibrant, humorous, critical, opinionated and flourishing online opportunity for people to engage in politics in their own way, outside the restrictions of the mass media" (p. 26) during the Scottish 2014 referendum. Adult education has a role to play in digital spheres as well as 'real' spaces, which as Crowther (2018) contends, can provide transformative educational responses to the underlying anger in populist movements to turn "such anger into hope, for fostering respect and belonging, and for turning despair into purposeful action" (p. 26). Significantly, New Literacy Studies is only interested in the technical aspects of technology (be it old or new tech) insofar as its implications to shape adults' social relations, attitudes, beliefs, norms, and access to power through digital literacies.

Critical Literacy

In the field of adult education, Paulo Freire's (1970/2005) seminal work on critical literacy and its focus on problem posing resulted in the

empowerment of adults through language, dialogical engagement, and recognition of adults' abilities to change the oppressive status quo as seen through many successful popular education literacy campaigns across the globe (Finnegan et al., 2021). As Finnegan et al. (2021) surmise in their tribute to Freire's work, and tracing the historical influence of popular education across the world:

> *Freire never tired of reminding us that people carry into the classroom invaluable insights into their own lives and society. Respect, and active interest, in this knowledge are fundamental for 'humanising education'. Critical dialogue builds from this through a double movement: the affirmation and exploration of the importance of everyday knowledge whilst also creating distance from the self-evident and given quality of the world as it appears and is experienced. This move into experience and critical reframing happens through problem posing which allows us 'to read the world' (Freire and Macedo, 1987) and deepen our understanding of the powers and structures that shape us. (p. 311-312)*

Problem posing makes learning open-ended and accessible to learners. It creates an inviting space for learners to realise that their opinions matter, and there is space for them to think through ways to be agents of change. What Finnegan et al. (2021) refer to as the "double movement" is this unique structure built into problem posing. Problem posing, as a pedagogical stance, simultaneously encourages both personal reflection and critical perspectives that take into account larger societal relations. This type of learning does not necessarily happen all at once. Critical dialogues take time and an ambience of trust and respect to gain momentum. Literacy in this context is all about feeling interested in and empowered to have a voice on subjects that matter to the participants. It is driven by a passion to begin problem solving that must come from the adult learners themselves, with the instructor posing questions, or providing a code (i.e. in the form of relevant photo), to encourage them to engage in critical dialogues, think through critical framing perspectives, and reflect upon and translate these ideas into concrete actions.

It is worth noting that New Literacy Studies and critical literacy, which began in adult education, have gone on to influence scholarship on

formal schooling in elementary, secondary, and higher education and sociocultural approaches to additional language learning. We also recognise that the Frankfurt school of critical theory (Brookfield, 2005), which examines power relations through concepts such as ideological critique, that question the underlying assumptions of power structures often embedded in dominant discourses, have helped to define contemporary conceptualizations of literacy.

Practitioners who teach adult basic education aspire to engage adult learners in critical thinking and critical literacy, but often their institutions' funding models are tied to teaching only functional literacy to help adult learners manage everyday activities like reading a bus schedule or a job application, which we recognise are in and of themselves important skills. Yet, we would argue, that functional literacy needs to be integrated within the larger social purpose of emancipatory education, ideological critique, and connecting critical literacy with being able to think through, conceptualize, articulate, and imagine ideas. Literacy is about building the capacity to think critically across the range of social relations and in various settings and mediums in the endeavor to build more equitable societies. In her study on a literacy program for women of colour, American adult educator Jaye Jones (2019) explores the value of critical literacy for learners, arguing that 'by identifying significant obstacles – and acknowledging the barriers that they had scaled – they fashioned an innovative roadmap for transformation' (p. 53). Critical literacy involves learners identifying for themselves important areas of learning.

hooks (1994), who also works from a critical literacy perspective, reminds us that hegemonic practices are often naturalized in language itself. For example, she recalls from her own teaching experiences students in a "course on black women writing were repressing all longing to speak in tongues other than standard English without seeing this oppression as political was an indication of the way we act unconsciously, in complicity with a culture of domination" (p. 173). An openness to vernacular dialects and languages, including listening even when it does not feel comfortable, is part of the emancipatory education project to overcome what hooks poignantly critiques as "particularly crucial in a multicultural society that remains white supremacist, that uses standard English as a weapon to silence and censor" (p. 172).

Luke (2004/2021) discusses critical literacy in the Australian context and what it would take to genuinely have redistributive social justice and evidence-based education policies in a multilingual society, saying that policy development must be:

> *Multidisciplinary, drawing from a range of sources and kinds of data (sociological, demographic, social geographic, economic, and, of course, linguistic as well as data on individual or institutional performativity). It needs to be reliant on interpretive debate and analysis at the most sophisticated levels, and socially and culturally contextual in the most fine-grained ways. This challenges governments, politicians and civil servants alike, senior educational administrators, and researchers to engage in new coalitions, to create new critical fora, new zones of proximal development for the articulation and implementation of educational policy. (p. 228)*

At the policy level, we see how critical literacy as an ongoing dialogue is to be theorised, contested, and retheorized to stay relevant – here, Luke articulates a very different version of what "evidence-based" policy might look like in which he proposes intellectual rigour that involves taking into account wider social and cultural phenomena in local contexts to support policy development. Critical literacy continues to be a cornerstone in adult literacy practices, which ideally should be foundational to policy making to ensure systemic supports are implemented to overcome enduring barriers that have disadvantaged certain historical and social groups. Given that policy always involves the allocation of resources, it is thus always political in nature (Luke, 2004/2021, p. 228). Luke at the time of writing this article (first published in 2004) was the Deputy Director-General of Queensland state education, and part of a team of researchers "undertaking policy research on the teaching of language and literacy education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the Queensland state system, working with Aboriginal teachers, principals and Elders" (p. 227). While Luke's work is mostly within the K-12 system, he always considers the role of the larger community, and his understanding of critical literacy is very applicable to adult education. Luke gives us an example of how policy that is informed by research and on-the-ground experiences of educators and community partners is more likely to be culturally responsive and provide leadership that has listened to its

members. Now we will turn to multiliteracies, which extends literacies pedagogy in a somewhat different direction.

Multiliteracies

The four main tenets of multiliteracies are cultural and linguistic diversity need to be incorporated into all learning; multimodality offers resources to learners to expand their meaning-making; technology must be tailored to serve pedagogical needs; and lastly, a social justice perspective speaks to the larger trajectory and purpose for integrating a multiliteracies pedagogy.

Multiliteracies, like New Literacy Studies and critical literacy, acknowledges the power dynamics of socially situated literacies that shape identities. While much of the research in the field of multiliteracies has tended to concentrate more so on empirical studies involving children, we argue (Holloway & Gouthro, 2020, 2024) that multiliteracies brings to adult education the distinctive lens of multimodality, and it is an area of research that merits further development. Multiliteracies from its inception (New London Group, 1996) has advocated for what we would characterize as a lifelong learning focus. For instance, the New London Group (2000) argue that "the languages needed to make meaning are radically changing in three realms of our existence: our working lives, our public lives (citizenship), and our personal lives (lifeworlds)" (p. 10). Literacy is rooted in every realm of our lives, and as adult educators, we "need to rethink what we are teaching, and, in particular, what new learning needs literacy pedagogy might address" (p. 10).

A main component of multiliteracies is multimodality, which recognizes a broad range of resources through combining various modes such as audio, visual, spatial, linguistic and tactile to contribute to meaning making situated within cultural and social contexts (Jewitt, 2017; Kress, 2010; Van Leeuwen, 2005). For example, in community-based adult learning, learners could put forth their convictions that their local waterways need to be cleaned up. They could create a multimodal video that would include audio mode (conversations acted out between characters; a narrative voice over; music), visual mode (video clips of the polluted local waterways; specific camera angles, fades, close up shots); written mode (a slogan to persuade the intended audience

to take action; film cuts to key phrases in local policy documents); and gestural mode (facial expression; hand movements; dance). In producing this video, the learners might draw upon the cultural symbolism of the waterways in their local, rural community's design, and speak to the historical forms of transport such as paddling as part of their multimodal composition. Cope and Kalantzis (2023) in developing "an account of grammar as patterns in meaning" observe that isolating reading and writing from other modes does not make sense, especially "in an era of pervasive digital media where these forms of meaning are so profoundly overlaid" (p. 1).

Kalantzis and Cope (2023) recall a recent study involving some of the New London Group members in Yolŋu country, the tropical north of Australia at the Literature Production Centre connected with the school in Yirrkala:

> *The teachers were producing multilingual, multimodal pedagogical texts. Their work was based on the philosophy of galtha or "a connecting spot." This might be represented in text or image but, equally, might be a place, the song and dance of a sacred ceremony, or people coming together for the preparation of bread from cycad nuts, or sitting on the ground to negotiate collective purpose. Not just a curriculum and not just in the school, "galtha is everywhere," the elders insisted. (Kalantzis & Cope, p. 29)*

In Yolŋu country, we witness an example of how multimodality is deeply intertwined with culture and history; making sense of the world is often specific to local communities and the combination of modes aids in the expression of cultural identities. Similarly, in adult education, when practitioners draw upon the wide range of prior experiences, knowledge, and cultural identities that adults have, they can work in tandem with multimodal texts that utilize their learners' informal, non-formal, and formal learning experiences from over the span of their lives. Learning to interpret images, sounds, and gestures alongside written or spoken words, in turn, gives adults the opportunity to infer greater meaning by being able to recognise the subtleties of language, especially through transduction, which involves moving from one mode to another (for example, writing a poem and then expressing ideas in that poem through creating a drawing). Reading graphic novels by comparing the

written text to the visual images, analysing the visual nuances of a web page layout, deciphering the tone or diction used by a public leader, or appraising the spatial layout of a learning space are key to critiquing the power dynamics braided into these multimodal designs. Multimodality is also evident in many arts-based research studies in adult education related to topics such as learning in marginalised communities (Butterwick & Roy, 2016), narratives of identity (Broadhead & Hooper, 2024), healthy aging (Lambert et al., 2024), and personal development (Townsend & Jones, 2024).

Anstey and Bull (2018) discuss how multiliteracies provide literacy educators with a useful pedagogical framework to address evolving societies' needs from the perspective of technologies and how they shape communication practices. They observe that in the context of workplaces that:

> *Effective listening and speaking when working in groups is an essential literate practice in today's workplace. Some researchers suggest that it is using spoken language that people can think creatively and productively together. Littleton and Mercer (2013, p. 1) suggest that in these contexts people do not simply use talk to interact, but to interthink. (pp. 19-20)*

Workplaces are influenced by intercultural employees being able to "read" cultural norms and behaviours. Furthermore, "teamwork, discussion and decision-making in these virtual meetings across workplaces is very much linked to the available modes, and consideration would need to be given to the purpose and desired outcome of the meeting" (p. 21) depending on connectivity and the range of modes used in teleconferencing (e.g. oral, visual, or written).

Multiliteracies looks at future paradigms with its attention to multimodality, technology, and cultural diversity, but it also integrates the four main historical strands of literacy pedagogy found in Western cultures: didactic, authentic, functional, and critical literacy (Kalantzis et al., 2016). *Didactic literacy* explicitly teaches via direct transmission of academic content to students, usually in the form of lectures or testing, with the belief that there is one correct rule-based answer. *Authentic literacy* promotes exploratory reading and writing that draws upon students' personal interests and experiences and encourages experiential learning and making connections beyond classroom walls to real-world

problems. *Functional literacy* gives students practical skills to read a wide range of texts and consider the different range of purposes that they serve. These texts are often used in everyday activities such as reading instructions on a label but can also serve larger social purposes such as discerning between texts like an opinion newspaper article versus a chemical report. *Critical literacy* involves students examining their own identities as well as recognizing how and why larger social discourses are framed in certain ways in society, usually to benefit the status quo. It encourages students to appraise multiple perspectives on any issue and find ways to turn their ideas into action to bring about positive social change. Kalantzis et al. (2016) maintain that educators need to use their professional judgement to determine when to deploy each of these strands of literacy pedagogy, acknowledging that they all have value, and a time and place in teaching practice to maximize learning.

In their vision for the future, the New London Group (1996, 2000) articulate the importance of learners as producers and designers, not just passive receivers of literacies. In this sense, they anticipate the greater agency that literacies might afford learners in being able to write their own stories and compositions, drawing upon multimodality to vividly express ideas for a range of purposes and audiences.

Sociocultural approaches to additional language learning

While multiliteracies initially only focused on cultural diversity, in the last fifteen years or so, there is now a small but growing body of research that is starting to reevaluate the role of linguistic diversity as well as cultural diversity using a multiliteracies framework (Paesani et al., 2016; Tavares, 2025; Zapata & Ribota, 2021). The field of sociocultural approaches to additional language learning complements and expands cognitive research about second language acquisition theory, which has traditionally dominated the field. Sociocultural approaches to additional language learning explore the importance of societal power relations in terms of language learning, identity affirmation, and translanguaging.

The broader concept of literacies undergirds sociocultural approaches to additional language learning, which recognise the need to affirm multilingual students' identities in the face of coercive societal power relations that devalue additional language learners' home cultures

and languages (Cummins, 2021). Additional language learning in adult education in recent years is largely focused on the challenges of migrants integrating into their new societies while also maintaining their identities (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2023; Levine & Mallows, 2021). We argue it is important that societies also recognise that they too might be shaped in positive ways by what migrants bring in terms of their home countries' cultural and linguistic backgrounds that will contribute to their new society (Gouthro & Holloway, 2023). Kloubert and Hoggan (2021) comment that:

> *In German adult education scholarship, there is a discussion around the principle of double discrimination through education: Individuals who do not receive a solid education in their childhood seldom participate in adult education, thereby deepening the divide between those born with access to education and those who were not. (p. 31)*

Inequity is compounded for many migrants, especially refugees, who often come from war-torn countries, and sometimes many years spent in refugee camps, in which formal education was interrupted or unavailable to them, or even if it was, other survival priorities may have had to take precedence. Moreover, this "double discrimination" is further exacerbated by many countries' labor market policies that funnel adult migrants into low-paid, dead-end work. These outcomes in the new country often leave migrants feeling disenfranchised. We find potential solutions, though, through lifelong learning research conducted in this area. For example, Gravani et al. (2024) in a comparative case study across four European countries found that:

> *Emancipatory Learner-Centered Education (ELCE) seeks to transform education spaces into possibilitarian sites of liberatory practice, where individual needs become communal needs, marginalised voices become centered voices in all aspects of the curricular experience, and education for survival is transformed into education for active engagement with the world. (p. 186)*

Analogously, using an assets-based approach to additional language learning, identity texts, as conceptualized by Cummins and Early (2015), invite additional language learners to become creators of short

books. Imagine that on one page, students write the story in their home language, and on the facing page (thus allowing for side-by-side comparison), students translate the story into the new target language that they are learning. Often these identity texts are written by two to three students with the same heritage language who may have varying levels of competency in both languages. Thus, they can contribute in different ways to the story's composition, editing, and illustrations. "The identity text then holds a mirror up to students to which their identities are reflected back in a positive light" (Cummins & Early, 2015, p 15). Although Cummins and Early's (2015) research focuses on children, we believe it could be leveraged with great success with adult additional language learners as well. Commenting on a sample identity text, Cummins and Early (2015) assert:

> *This example illustrates the insight first articulated by Courtney Cazden that performance proceeds competence. In other words, we develop confidence in particular spheres by participating in socially supportive groups focused on achieving particular goals. Expressed more concretely, before she wrote The New Country, Madiha [an immigrant student] could not have read the English text. However, after she and her friends had discussed and written the story in both Urdu and English, she had acquired the English linguistic competence to read and understand the English text. (p. 18)*

Identity texts are a creative way to affirm students' plurilingual identities while building language skills in a comfortable learning environment. As Cummins et al. (2005) note, "since bilingual/ESL students' prior knowledge is encoded in their L1 [first language], educators should explicitly teach for transfer of concepts and skills from L1 to English" (p. 23). As students participate in developing their identity text, they move back and forth between the two languages while writing the story, with each learner contributing based on their ideas, prior knowledge, and varied fluency levels in both languages. Their identity text, in the shape of an illustrated book, will later be shared with the broader audiences of peers, family, and the community in hard copy or digitally online.

The resources available to adult educators wanting to adopt a sociocultural approach to additional language learning are often lackluster or unavailable, and textbooks still tend to portray diverse

cultural identities in a cliché fashion. In their research findings, Warner and Dupuy (2018) identify that one of the pragmatic limitations of using multiliteracies in foreign language teaching is the lack of complementary resources. They criticize

> *an emphasis on grammatical content and a lack of meaningfully integrated texts continues to be hallmarks of mainstream commercial textbooks, which form the bedrock of FL [foreign language] instruction and professional development in many curricula. Furthermore, the thematic content of textbooks often continues to be introduced in a 'culturally neutral' way, often through short, author-created texts with no clear audience or intent in mind and devoid of ambiguous meaning." (Warner & Dupuy, 2018, p. 122)*

Teaching additional languages has traditionally relied heavily on textbooks that lay out grammar in a procedural way and offer conversational exchanges that read as formulaic transactions that comply with very rule-bound conventions of language. Warner and Dupuy (2018) show how exploring identity and language are rebuffed through these contrived and often prescriptive scenarios in textbooks that do not represent authentic cultural contexts.

Lastly, we believe that a newly evolving theory called translanguaging is quite ground-breaking in relation to the field of sociocultural approaches to additional language learning. Wei (2018) defines translanguaging as "a practice that involves dynamic and functionally integrated use of different languages and language varieties, but more importantly, a process of knowledge construction that goes beyond language(s)" (p. 15). Translanguaging encourages culturally and linguistically diverse learners to move back and forth between their range of language repertoires. Indeed, Wei (2018) contends that we each have our own personal language, our own idiolect, rather than separate languages (see Cummins, 2021 for a critique of translanguaging and "the proposition that languages don't exist as countable linguistic entities" p. 263). García and Lin (2016) state that "a translanguaging perspective means that individuals will be able to more openly appropriate linguistic features and make them their own" (p. 127).

Like multiliteracies, translanguaging interestingly sees the "use of a variety of cognitive, semiotic, and modal resources of which language

in its conventional sense of speech and writing is only one" (Wei, 2018, p. 18). This insight suggests that multimodality plays a role in learning additional languages. Thus, certain gestures or facial expressions, architectural spatial designs, or particular forms of dress can be read and analyzed as part of multimodal cross-cultural meaning making. As an example of what this concept might look like in practice, in their ethnographic research study, Burgess and Rowsell (2020) used a transcultural, translanguaging approach that also drew upon affect theory. In workshops with adult immigrants and refugees, they asked these research participants to bring in an artifact and to share the story of their artifact with the class. Burgess and Rowsell (2020) wrote that after one participant shared a sentimental story of her family ring, the other "group members discussed other similar intergenerational, often culturally infused artifacts that they have at home or back in their home countries" (p. 185). In adult education, translanguaging practices that include multimodality can empower learners to use a full repertoire of language features in various modalities to express their thoughts and feelings.

These innovative, and we would argue, inclusive and compassionate approaches to additional language learning, provide crucial steps forward to teach citizens new languages and give them a sense of belonging. These approaches also welcome adult migrants into their new countries while encouraging them to feel pride in their home cultures, a willingness to use their heritage languages with others, including their children, and an acknowledgement that being plurilingual is an important asset in our 21st century globalised world.

Concluding remarks

This Special Edition of the Australian Journal of Adult Learning (AJAL) explores various trends developing at the forefront of literacies in adult education, and considers ways that literacies are being defined and enacted in current times in research and practice. While these four fields of literacy studies each have certain distinguished features, they also overlap at times, and over the years, we have seen crossovers between them and fruitful collaborations among researchers and practitioners. New Literacy Studies, critical literacy, multiliteracies, and sociocultural approaches to additional language learning consider a range of equity, diversity, inclusion and access issues, looking at factors such as gender,

Indigeneity, ability, age, race, religion, culture and/or social class. Equity, diversity, inclusion and access are the stepping stones needed to render into reality Rowsell and Pahl's (2015) claim that, "literacy can act as an agent of change and can encourage new forms of activism, resistance and revolution" (p. 1). We have sketched out some of the emerging concepts that are shaping approaches to literacies, but in the articles that follow, we think readers will find more nuanced, highly contextualized arguments that speak to issues of power, policies and practices in adult literacies.

Summaries of articles

Lyn Tett from Scotland draws upon two of her previous research studies to consider how new policy developments that align with Human Capital Theory to emphasize employability skills are impacting on staff working in literacy programs in Scotland. Whilst many practitioners retain a social justice focus as they create 'workarounds' to support their students, literacy educators also recognise that despite the government rhetoric of the importance of education, decreased funding for literacy programs, low salaries, and increased paperwork to secure funding, all counter these claims.

John Zimba's ethnographic study in his home country of Zambia investigates the digital literacy practices amongst rural women with a particular focus on their mobile phone usage. New Literacy Studies and Nussbaum's capabilities approach inform this study. Zimba also provides a critique of Zambian adult literacy policies. The study's findings reveal that digital literacies play a significant role in these women's empowerment in the informal economy and their overall well-being.

Karen Magro from Canada takes a critical and thoughtful approach to understanding artistic literacies through the lens of transformative learning theory for adults. Aligning with a multiliteracies approach, she explores opportunities for learning through transcultural literacies, affective literacies, and environmental literacies with a focus on multimodality considering the value of sensory experiences generated in learning through visual arts, poetry, and related literary texts.

Carmen Toscano-Fuentes, Analí Fernández-Corbacho, and Carmen Fonseca-Mora from Spain draw upon a multiliteracies approach to

explore the impact of affective literacy on adult migrants' language learning. In their systematic literature review, they investigate affective literacy (how it has been conceptualized as well as how it is used in teaching and deployed in research). Their findings suggest that the role of affective literacy in adult learning is beneficial.

Canadian, Jennifer Sumner, draws upon a critical Freirean perspective from an adult learning and education (ALE) perspective to examine the concept of food literacy. Sumner argues that this goes beyond having individual learners understand nutrition issues. Attaining critical food literacies also involves a critical assessment of food production and marketing systems, perspectives on Indigenous food sovereignty, public health, and sustainability issues.

In their article on critical literacies, Petra Robinson and Maja Stojanovic examine the course titles and outlines of adult education programs across the United States to determine how many offerings include a critical literacy focus, which they argue is also often aligned with teaching that focuses on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) issues.

Using multiliteracies and social semiotics, Kathy Sanford, Bruno de Oliveira Jayme, and Tanya Manning-Lewis from Canada, share experiences of working in various international contexts to argue for an expanded understanding of what constitutes literacies. Drawing upon examples from their work in Jamaica, Brazil and Uganda, each author gives examples of how multiliteracies can be manifested in different ways in learning in communities across the globe.

Stories of practice

In the Australian context, Anneleis Humphries, Catherine Smith, and Julie Choi delve into the story of one instructor's attempt to bring in a critical literacy focus in her class for English-as-an-Additional-Language learners who were in an academic English program. They explore the barriers refugees face in coming to a new country and critically question the challenges that instructors confront, and how they could consider ways to be responsive to various students' perspectives and develop greater intercultural understanding through sociocultural approaches to additional language learning.

In their "Stories of Practice," John Casey and Diane Gardner profile a

non-profit organisation in Scotland they have developed for educators working in literacy programs that provide digital resources, including a mobile app, explicitly focused on supporting adult literacy learning. In their paper, they use a critical literacy lens to explore the detrimental impacts of neoliberalism on literacy, pushing back at a “transactional” approach to literacy that focuses just on employability, to argue that from a social justice perspective, all citizens should be able to gain literacy skills.

Annie Luk, Judy Perry, and Phylicia Davis-Wesseling draw upon New Literacy Studies to delve into stories of their own practice as literacy educators in Canada, arguing that educators need to work collaboratively to attempt to influence the development of policies that are more supportive and inclusive, while at the same helping their students to gain a sense of individual agency.

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About the editors

Susan M. Holloway is a professor is the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor in Canada. Her areas of research include adult education, teacher education, multiliteracies, critical literacy, sociocultural approaches to language learning, critical and feminist theory. She was the principal investigator on a recently completed Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Insight grant that focused on examining the teaching and learning of adults and adolescents through a multiliteracies lens.

Patricia A. Gouthro is a Professor in Graduate Studies in Lifelong Learning in the Faculty of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She is a past President of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education and served as an editor for the *International Journal of Lifelong Education*. Her research interests include critical and feminist theory, multiliteracies, professional education, citizenship, arts-based education, and learning with fiction.

Contact details

Susan M. Holloway: *holloway@uwindsor.ca*

Patricia A. Gouthro: *Patricia.Gouthro@msvu.ca*