

# AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT LEARNING

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## **From the Editors' desk**

Cheryl Ryan and Piper Rodd

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This edition of AJAL heralds some significant changes for the journal as we enter a new era of editorship. Associate Professor Trace Ollis recently stepped down as editor following seven successful years at the helm. She leaves a strong legacy of championing adult education in Australia and internationally, always encouraging of new perspectives and high-quality research that advances our collective knowledge in this important space. Trace has been a life-long advocate for social justice, fighting to give voice to others.

We inherit the journal in good shape thanks to Trace's assiduous work and care. We are committed to continuing the important work of the journal and will be seeking opportunities to advance the journal's impact and influence in Australia and internationally.

Our recent federal election provides some certainty for our country with the dominance of Labor entrenched for at least the next three years. With this in mind, we invite the government to be bold and committed to adult learning in Australia. We welcome the Honourable Andrew Giles in his continuing role as Minister for Skills and Training, and the Honourable Jason Clare as Minister for Education. Their ongoing leadership provides important continuity for the sector at a time when many continue to face complexity and precarity.

This edition features an array of interconnected research from Australia and international scholars. The various topics of the refereed papers include culturally and linguistically diverse adult learners in adult and community education in Australia. Canadian study on intergenerational learning for Chinese immigrant seniors. Two studies from Australia, one focusing on COVID-19 and digital poverty and trauma for adult learners, and the application of social equity discourses to support the education of adult learners, post-pandemic. From Taiwan, the reemployment of middle-aged and older adults. All of these articles provide fascinating insights into the eclectic work and contexts of adult teaching and learning in communities.

The book review for this edition is by Bill Gammage on **Six Peaks speak: Unsettling legacies in Southern Dja Dja Wurrung Country** by Barry Golding with Clive Willman (2024), which centres on six mountain peaks in central Victoria as they 'speak' of the Dja Dja Wurrung presence, the people and its land before and after invasion.

The first of our five research papers featured in this volume, examines the experiences of educators working with culturally and linguistically diverse learners in various community settings. In this article, entitled **Challenges and opportunities in empowering adult CALD learners: Insights from Australian adult community educators**, the authors draw on interviews with five practitioners seeking to develop a critical understanding of how they view their work. Anneleise Humphries and Glosia Klatt explore the notion of empowerment of learners with diverse needs in this complex context. They argue that policy is wanting, and CALD educators are often left to their own devices providing much needed supports to those they teach. The service to our collective community provided by these practitioners extends well beyond English language instruction as they empower their learners in a variety of ways.

The second piece of refereed research in this edition comes from Canada and looks at the experience of older learners studying online. Specifically, Yidan Zhu and Weigou Zhang, present research on Chinese immigrants to Canada who learned invaluable online skills during the COVID pandemic. In **Intergenerational learning for active aging amid the pandemic: Chinese immigrant seniors' online learning in Canada**, Zhu and Zhang argue for the importance of

intergenerational learning, key to engendering active learners into old age. Despite the inequities experienced by migrant communities living in Canada, exacerbated by the pandemic, relatively little research has been done examining these lived experiences. This article provides important insight into adult learning for seniors more likely to be isolated by intersecting conditions of language, culture and technological inexperience. The authors conducted interviews with fifteen older Chinese-Canadians about their experiences of intergenerational learning finding the importance of this process as grounded in knowledge sharing for active, ongoing learning. For these participants, a desire to keep learning during the pandemic provided the added bonus of helping them to develop skills necessary to use digital technologies, ensuring essential connectivity and encouraging continued personal development and engagement in community beyond retirement.

The third article we've included in this edition of the journal also concerns the significance of digital technologies in our lives during the COVID pandemic. In this piece of research, Janine Arentes looks at what she terms "digital poverty" in the Australian higher education sector, exploring the experience of academics and students during a challenging time for so many. In **Digital poverty, trauma, and education: Reflections from the crisis pivot to online learning** Arentes argues this period saw a confluence of need for many students whose experience of learning became turned upside down. Defining digital poverty as a "lack of access to information and communication technologies, as well as socioeconomic obstacles to education", the author presents the use of the trauma informed teaching by three academics as important to providing some redress. This research finds that trauma informed practices can be applied in a variety of circumstances, meeting "divergent needs" of both teachers and learners, bridging intersecting social, pedagogical and economic challenges compounding and coalescing during times of acute change.

In Ana Larsen and Susan Emmett's paper titled **COVID-19 and social equity in higher education: Applying a typology of social equity discourses to a complex situation** they argue the impacts of the pandemic on higher education and adult learners in higher education continue to be realised. Notable are concerns for the strengthening of neoliberalism and subsequent policy implications which emphasise the need for the re-emergence of "social equity in

higher education” to address the under-representation of social groups to access and participate in higher education (UNESCO, 2021). For example, in Australia, these groups comprise women studying STEM, Indigenous Australians, low socio-economic status, among others. Integral to how these groups are identified and positioned in higher education and the education system more broadly reflects discourses imbued with deficit thinking. The individual, family, culture are the source of their status as “at risk”, “disadvantaged”, vulnerable students, rather than the systemic and structural inequalities of institutions. Larsen and Emmett’s paper presents a typology of four social equity discourses – Economist (Neo-liberal), Human Potential (Transformative), Social Justice, and Meritocratic – for readers to reflect on and gain insights to interplay of the discourses, the impact of the pandemic on the discourses and on the under-represented student groups in higher education. While they note impacts on the economic status of universities, increased stress and burnout, for example, they also note positive impacts of the pandemic in the form of a renewed interest in mental health and well-being. The authors hope for positive change in policy and institutions from critical reflections on the typology of social equity discourses.

The final paper in this edition titled **Successful reemployment of middle-aged and older adults in Taiwan: A basis of lifelong learning experiences** by Ya-Hui Lee and Yi-Fen Wang adopts a qualitative research approach to the re-employment and learning experiences of middle-aged and older adults in Taiwan. A phenomenological methodology and semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to explore the nature and context of these adults’ learning and re-employment. Data from the interviews were analysed using a constant comparative method emphasising data comparison and reflection (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Harding, 2013). Their analysis revealed three themes: (1) Reasons for career interruptions and re-employment – caregiver and helper, health issues, relief as caregiver or financial pressure, (2) Restarting a career through learning – taking free courses, workplace learning, formal and non-formal education, and informal learning, and (3) Benefits of learning at work – linking new learning to existing experience, continuously learning, increased confidence and courage. They found that most of the participants in the study had been out of the workforce for 10-20 years. The availability of

free vocational training courses afforded participants with opportunities to develop new skills needed to return to work. For example, computer technology and clerical skills were most helpful. The participants' active engagement in formal, informal, non-formal learning was key to the success of their re-employment. Lee and Wang's paper provides readers with insights to the Taiwanese culture and society, and government programs that support middle-aged and older individuals to learn and return to the workforce.