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From the Editors' desk

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We begin this editorial amid times of geopolitical tensions and disruptions that prefigure varying degrees of uncertainty for individuals, communities, and society. We are experiencing rapid change, especially in the field of technology, which is predicted to have significant impacts on work, life, and education.

The 2026 Intergenerational Report: Australia's future to 2066 (IGR) (Australian Government, Treasury, 2026) acknowledges ongoing disaggregation of world politics. It recognises the rapid pace of the development of artificial intelligence (AI) as 'a defining influence' on Australia's economy (p. vii). Further to this, the impact of AI on tasks and labour will vary. Some AI will 'automate' tasks and replace 'human labour' while others will 'augment' 'human labour' thereby requiring the development of new skills (p.16). A preliminary perusal of the IGR for items relevant to education revealed: the need for investments in education and skills development to boost productivity; the Future Skills Organisation (FSO) will oversee AI capability established in the education and training sector; skills development and education will continue to respond to AI and changes in the workplaces; education and training systems to be responsive to the exigencies of the changing workforce; the workforce to be adaptable, with transferable skills and advanced specialist skills; increased educational achievement and

access to tertiary education for productive and skilled labour force; the development of a National Credit Recognition Framework for those with VET qualifications shifting to university; and an 'ambitious target for 80 per cent of working age population to have a tertiary qualification (Certificate Iii or above) by 2050' (p.249).

All in all, the IGR, the burgeoning AI bubble, and the current state of the world emphasise and reinforce the value and power of critical thinking and research in the fields of adult and community education and lifelong and life-wide learning. Knowledge, continuing education and learning for life (not only for work) need to be pursued with vigour in times of change and uncertainty.

On this note, I am reminded of our special edition – **Policy, practice and pedagogy: Adult education in times of decaying capitalism and failed democracy** – coming to you in November 2026. We have had an exceptional response to invitations for submissions to the edition. The quality of submissions is a testament to the research and scholarly endeavours and practices on this topic by many colleagues nationally and internationally.

This edition features five research articles and a book review. We have a mix of international and Australian research. Adults learning in educational contexts with different learning needs feature throughout the articles. For example, mature age students in Australian tertiary education; research by adult learners in higher education in South Korea; students in remote learning in Australian regional higher education; adult education, transformative learning and religious education for adults in Australia; and the value of creative, narrative and autoethnographic modes of inquiry for adult education practitioners and researchers.

The book review is by Cheryl Ryan. She reviews the 2009 publication **Analysing Policy: What's the problem represented to be?** by Carol Bacchi. The work provides readers – students, practitioners, educators, researchers, policy analysts – with Bacchi's approach – a "how-to guide" – to policy analysis. In addition to the Introduction and Conclusion, there are 10 chapters that introduce and define a "what's the problem represented to be?" (WPR) approach, the theory and politics of the different approaches, and examples of applying the WPR approach to various contexts (e.g., youth and unemployment, education,

crime and justice, health, population and immigration, among others). Bacchi's WPR approach to policy analysis affords a different, "unconventional" but accessible, critical and effective means of analysis. The reviewer reminds us of the value of policy analysis in the current turbulent social, political, and economic times.

Our first research paper by Stephen Billett and Anh Hai Le is titled **Guiding and supporting mature age students in Australian tertiary education**. This is part of an international project: Widening Access to Mature Students sponsored by Nelson College, United Kingdom. The project is focused on widening access to and participation for mature age students in tertiary education (i.e., higher education and vocational education). The research centred on three key elements: how mature age students were defined by staff in Australian tertiary education institutions; how mature age students' participation was perceived and experienced by staff; and what effective forms of guidance and support were identified to assist mature age students to participate and succeed. The findings will be of interest to policy makers, researchers, tertiary institutions, academic / teaching staff, student support services and mature age students.

A South Korean study is the second paper titled **Topic modelling of adult learning research in South Korea before and after COVID-19: A text mining approach** by Kyubeen Lee and Seokyoung Oh. It uses a text mining approach to trace structural changes in South Korean adult learning research before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings revealed the strengthening of adult learner and lifelong learning disciplines, some reconfiguration in terms of equity and new topics in the areas of methodological reflexivity and developmental disability. Its legacy is a richer and more analytically diverse toolkit for analysing future trends, conducting systematic reviews, and funding research projects. This research provides an evidence base that will interest policy makers, research funders, and adult learners engaged in research.

The methodologies of autoethnography and narrative inquiry are at the heart of the third paper by Jerry O'Neill. The paper is titled **Pictures at an exhibition: Creative and reflective encounters with an academic conference**. It offers a different approach – methodology, purpose, format – to much of the work we see in the journal. It is

formatted in a way that showcases how autoethnographic and narrative inquiry can be written and presented (e.g., prose, poetry, pictures) and it includes, for readers new to these methodologies, definitions and descriptions of autoethnography and narrative research. Jerry's paper will be of interest to researchers and practitioners of adult education keen to explore creative, narrative and autoethnographic approaches to qualitative inquiry.

Post-conversion religious education in Australia: A case study of Dandenong Emir Sultan Mosque by Ramazan Ötkün and Mehmet Emin Ay is the fourth paper in this edition. This paper details a qualitative single-site case study examining the post-conversion religious education among adults who embrace Islam. It's focus on post-conversion learning rather than just motivation to convert addresses an under-researched area of inquiry. The study draws attention to the nexus between adult education and religious education. The findings revealed that an extended education process is needed to enable learning beyond the foundational beliefs and practices, with an emphasis on transformative learning, belonging, cultural inclusion and identity reconstruction.

The final research paper titled **Student belonging during COVID-19 emergency remote learning: A case study from an Australian regional university** by David Waldron, Ana Larsen and Bryce Magnuson distinguishes between concerns identified during COVID-19 and current concerns relevant to online and blended learning in higher education. The research was conducted in 2020. A qualitative case study using an online survey elicited responses from 198 students commencing undergraduate university studies and learning via emergency remote teaching during COVID-19. The survey focused on the academic, social, environmental, and personal domains. The findings revealed that academic concerns were prominent. Social belonging was connected to the academic concerns due to limited access to lecturers, peer interaction, and informal communication. Of significance to current online and blended learning, the authors argue for course design and accompanying support and communication strategies to engender inclusion, connection and participation.

Dr. Cheryl Ryan

23 September 2026