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From the Editor

This issue of the Newsletter is published as the sixth annual Adult Learners Week is about to start. Again the spotlight will be on lifelong learning. But it is more than just two words. Many people will celebrate individual achievements as made against the odds. They will celebrate innovative programs and those education providers’ optimism that education and learning can make a difference, that it can indeed change lives.

In addition to celebration there will be exploration of new ideas and how the umbrella term ‘lifelong learning’ can be applied in practice. And there will be reflection: reviewing the Hamburg Agenda for the Future and its application to Australia; reviewing educational practice, and considering public policy.

There are many lifelong learning seedlings in Australia in areas like online learning and technological innovation, learning towns, new approaches to curriculum and revived approaches to community development. However, we still lack a cohesive national policy which can serve to integrate these initiatives.

Adult Learning in the 21st Century

Now is the time to make a step forward or risk stalling.

Education policy remains largely locked behind sectoral boundaries, as well as reactive to immediate political concerns.

The twentieth century has been described as the age of democracy. Suffrage became universal, citizenship was extended, and aspirations to full employment and access to welfare became the norm.

Education has always been at the heart of democracy. Through the twentieth century compulsory school education was established, and progressively extended from six years to nine, to ten and then twelve.

University education, at least initially, was free to all who could gain admission. The common slogan became ‘education for all’.

But that education was firmly rooted in the formal education institutions of school and university and understood to be for the young, for the future.

Inclusion and ownership. Secondly, a piece about the experience of Glasgow, perhaps the quintessential post-industrial city, and its attempt to develop a Learning City. We also report on the diverse approaches to Adult Learners Week from Africa to Asia and Europe.

Close to home we look at how two towns are taking up the Learning City initiative in Victoria; the use of video-conferencing and networking among rural ACE providers in NSW; and speak to the new Director of Melbourne’s Council of Adult Education.

During ALW we can take the time to stand back and reflect on the state of Australian adult education and learning. To take the time to appreciate and celebrate our colleagues, students and peers’ efforts and initiatives. We can take time to discuss with others engaged in the learning process about what policies and frameworks are needed to produce a fairer, more productive, nurturing and democratic society. We can collectively exchange, talk and learn from each other.

Tony Brown