From the Editor's desk
Dr Trace Ollis, on the road from Europe and the UK

Jack Kerouac said on travel ‘nothing behind me, everything ahead of me, as it ever is so on the road’.

I find myself writing the editorial in Regensburg, Germany. I am away on academic study leave and have attended several conferences, first in England and now in Europe. I have met so many people who are committed to adult education, who know the power and importance of adult education to transform learners’ lives. So, this editorial will focus on some of the papers I’ve seen and heard and other notable issues of relevance to the readership of AJAL as I’ve been travelling around.

I was in the UK in the time of Brexit and the election of the new Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Surprising, I have not met anyone who seems keen on the idea of their new Prime Minister, and lament that only approximately 130,000 members of the Tory Party are able to have a say in who will be their country’s new Prime Minister. Raising fundamental questions about democratic systems of government and governance and the implications for countries like the United Kingdom and also the European Union, the implications are wide ranging because of their failure to negotiate a palatable deal for Brexit.

I attended the annual conference for research and education (ACRE) at Edgehill University in Ormskirk, Lancashire, surrounding by the most
beautiful gardens. Jan McArthur from Lancaster University gave a keynote on Higher Education titled ‘Towards a Moral University: Critical theory, social justice and a commitment to the vicissitudes of human fate and the moral university’ using critical theory, notably in the work of Adorno and Horkeimer. She argued against accepting the current state of the neoliberal university, with its focus on the regulations of academic research, and the lack of freedom for academics to pursue good critical academic work. In spite of these discourses she believes these ‘need not be so’, which became one of the themes and conversation points of the conference. I saw several inspiring papers but one notable paper, delivered by Claire Woodhouse and Laura Nicholson, was on the professional development of teaching assistants. They argued for professional learning that was informed by critical pedagogy one which encouraged these workers/learners to form a ‘community of practice’ (Lave, & Wenger, 1991). This would enable them to build their practice by forging a learning community.

In Germany, I attended the Research Working and Learning conference 11 in Giessen Germany. This is a large biannual international conference which focusses on adult learning and work, in informal and formal settings in workplaces and communities and in industry. One of the keynotes was given by Professor Henning Patzold, titled Learning and Decision making in a Post Truth Era. This salient presentation raised many questions regarding the current technological revolution that we find ourselves in this ‘contemporary condition of work’, where we are bombarded with so much information, where knowledge is accessible at our fingertips through the new technologies and social media. Yet we also find ourselves incredibly time poor and unable to make time for critical engagement and at times uncomfortable conversations about issues that affect the work we do as educators.

It has been an interesting few weeks, that I have enjoyed immensely, after learning so much, and meeting educators from around the world doing great things in education theory and practice. I return to the theme of on the road with a final quote for Jack Kerouac who ponders about travel, ‘What would be in store for me in the direction I did not take?’

In this current issue of AJAL we have papers that cross the breadth and scope of adult learning in Australia and elsewhere, focussing on pedagogy and practice in spaces and places where adult learning occurs. In Higher Education, the professional learning of engineers, adult learning in the online learning environment and two articles on the importance of learning for
people with disabilities – one through a horse-riding education program and the other a university program for older learners with disabilities.

Cathy Stone and Matthew Springer's paper *Interactivity, connectedness and teacher-presence: Engaging and retaining students online* looks at the importance of teacher presence in the online learning environment. In an environment of adult education where courses are increasingly being delivered online, they argued for greater teacher presence in the learning process.

Sarah Gat, Margalit Pade and Michal Avrech Bar’s paper focuses on adult learning in Israel titled *A picture paints a thousand words: Collage-making in higher education problem-based learning*. This paper explores using creative pedagogies in the classroom focusing on collage-making in order to engage students in deep level learning.

Clayton Mullen and Yohannes Mariam in their paper *Adult learning: Barriers and enablers to advancement in Canadian power engineering* use quantitative research methodology to uncover the impediments and enablers to professional learning for engineers. This paper will have synergies for those who are involved with the professional development needs of engineers in the Australian context.

Anh Nguyet Diep, Celine Cocquyt, Chang Zhu, Maurice De Greef, Minh Hien Vo and Tom Vanwing in their paper *Adult learners’ needs in online and blended learning viewed through the lens of existence, relatedness and growth (ERG) theory* use ERG theory as a framework to support adult learners to optimally perform in learning and to sustain their motivation.

Rob Townsend and Michelle Hood explore the importance of education programs for adult with disabilities through horse riding in their paper *Horse talk: Equine based learning programs and their engagement with individuals*. The paper uncovers the skill development of the participants, but also the social and emotional benefits for people with disabilities through their interaction with other learners in the program, affirming what we know about the importance of adult learning being relational and embedded in our interactions with other people.

Marianna Müller de Morais and Lucia Rapsová’s paper titled *Psychological bases of developing social competences of seniors with disability* explores the benefits of adult learning for older people with disabilities through a university enabling program.